

ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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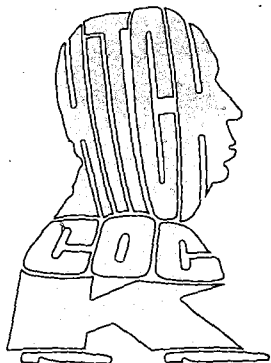
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April 1974



Dear Reader:

If you should hear complaints from the younger set about the shortage of eggs at this particular season, you may advise them that the pick of the hard-boiled variety lie—and demonstrate all sorts of more grievous character failings—in the pages of this magazine. Colorful tough eggs abound (along with a few chicks), and they bear their crosses with class. In fact, they invariably prefer not to be liberated of such burdens. Otherwise, they would hardly qualify as a vital part of your reading matter.

Indeed, they do qualify, from those to be met in *A Putting Away of Toys* by Richard Deming, to the inimitable Ed McBain's personages in this month's novelle from the 87th Precinct titled *The Jesus Case*.

So place this macabre confection in your basket, and promise yourself to adorn your nest with all future issues. Time will pass as quick as a bunny, no matter the season.

Good reading.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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## ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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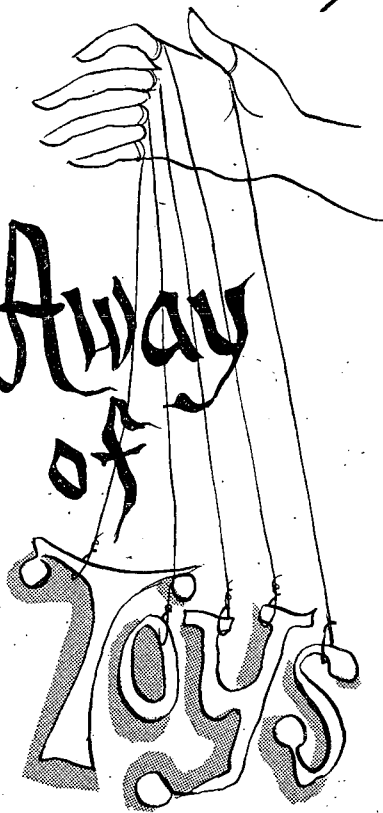
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## ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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*Puppeteering is not without its risks to all concerned, it seems.*

# A Putting Away of Zov's



**M**y friends at Columbia University always thought it a little weird that my mother was a nightclub entertainer while my father was a psychiatrist, but actually she would never have developed her act if he hadn't been a psychiatrist. He taught her hypnotism before they broke up, you see. I doubt that he would have if he had suspected the eventual use she would make of it, because even after the divorce it must have been an embarrassment for a shrink with his exclusive clientele, who routinely used hypnosis on his own celebrity-patients, to have

an ex-wife whose nightclub act involved putting people under hypnosis to make them quack like ducks and hop like frogs.

He never mentioned being embarrassed, at least to me. I never heard him say anything critical about Mother except the rather mild objection that she tried to keep me tied too close to her apron strings.

I grew up listening to a steady stream of complaints about Dad, though. Although the divorce had been Mother's idea and neither ever remarried, she never quite forgave him for his failure as a husband. One of her favorite themes was that she couldn't understand how a man who lost his own wife through total lack of understanding could charge such exorbitant fees to advise others on how to deal with their interpersonal relationships.

Except for Mother's complaints to me, their post-divorce relationship was amiable enough because she never mentioned his shortcomings to Dad himself. She was pleasant enough to him when he picked me up on weekends, and when they sometimes discussed such things as my schoolwork or what summer camp I should attend, they sounded quite friendly.

by Richard  
Deming

I can't recall her ever saying anything nice about him to me, however.

It was years after the breakup before Mother started her nightclub act. I was only two at the time of the divorce, and Mother didn't go into show business until I was a freshman at Columbia.

At least she didn't go into professional show business until then. As long as I can remember, her act was part of the annual Amateur Variety Show for Charity at the Los Angeles Music Center, she was the star of the annual children's party at the Beverly Hills Country Club, and she performed at most of the private parties she attended. She really had professional stature for years before she finally turned pro.

She claimed it was her friends' urgings to which she finally gave in. Certainly it wasn't the money, because Grandfather left her something like four million dollars, she received additional income as administratrix of the million-dollar trust fund left to me, and Dad had been paying her a phenomenal amount of child support until I reached eighteen.

I suspect her real reason was simply that it gave her an excuse to spend a lot of time within visiting distance of me. Uprooting herself from Beverly Hills to fol-

low me to the East Coast would have been hard to explain to her friends, or even to me, but show business gave her a legitimate excuse to be anywhere in the country her bookings took her.

Coincidentally, they seemed always to take her within no more than an hour's flight from New York City, so that she got to see me often. Although Las Vegas and Los Angeles were top markets for nightclub acts, she never seemed to have bookings there. I rather suspect that *all* of her bookings would have been in New York City if she could have arranged it but, by its very nature, a hypnosis act has to be short run, so she had to branch out from there.

Also coincidentally, she never seemed to have bookings when I was home in Beverly Hills during Easter, Christmas or summer vacations.

Another thing that makes me feel I was the real motive for her going into show business was the fuss she raised about my going to Columbia instead of to UCLA. She couldn't understand why I insisted on traveling clear across the country when there was a perfectly good school near home. The fact that New York City was the center of the legitimate theater, and my interest was in eventually writing, directing and producing

plays, didn't strike her as a reasonable argument. Why couldn't I study medicine and psychology and become a psychiatrist like my father? Or if I insisted on a show business career, why couldn't I settle for film-making, in which UCLA had an excellent course?

Dad resolved the argument by becoming stern with her. The only times I can recall him being stern with Mother were occasions when they disagreed about what was best for me. Dad rather witheringly told her she was behaving like a Philip Wylie mom, and if she didn't soon cut the umbilical cord, people would start laughing behind her back. She gave in then, because she would rather have died than have discovered that people were laughing at her.

Despite being such a high-priced solver of emotional problems, Dad never quite understood the relationship between Mother and me. I was never in much danger of becoming a mama's boy. I think I was about eight when I first became aware of her mommish desire to devour me. Most boys would either have given in or rebelled. I couldn't rebel because I sincerely loved Mother and couldn't possibly have done anything to hurt her feelings, but I couldn't give in either. So I worked out my own adroit

method to avoid being devoured. It required considerable acting talent, and may be the origin of my interest in the theater.

I'd say, "Yes, ma'am," when Mother cautioned me against going near the ocean, but I could hang ten on a surfboard by the time I was twelve. Fortunately Dad always gave me a lot of extra spending money that Mother never knew about, so obtaining equipment was no problem. I kept my surfboards, wet suits and, later on, scuba-diving equipment, at the homes of various friends. They were conditioned never to mention in Mother's presence any activity we had engaged in that Mother might consider either dangerous or ungentlemanly. Insofar as I was concerned, the umbilical cord had been cut long before Dad mentioned the matter.

Apparently Mother wasn't aware of it, though. She continued to watch over me protectively all the time I was at Columbia U.

There was the matter of my two previous engagements before Ellen, for instance. Mother hired the Flynn Detective Agency to investigate both girls.

I have to admit that in each case the investigation prevented me from making a disastrous mistake. The news that Mary Jane Potter had undergone three abor-

tions before graduating from high school nearly destroyed me at the time but, as Mother pointed out, it was certainly better to find out how promiscuous she was before marriage than to catch her in bed with one of my friends afterward; and hearing the tape of Susan Harmon bragging to her roommate how she had hooked the richest jerk in college was hardly good for my ego, but it was better than ending up with that calculating little wench.

In my senior year, when I found Ellen Whittier, I couldn't stand the thought of another investigation. I knew it would be impossible to convince Mother that none was necessary in this case so, after brooding about it for a while, I finally decided the only honest thing to do was warn Ellen of what was coming, even at the risk of having her indignantly break off our engagement. I made it clear to Ellen that I heartily disapproved of Mother's investigations, but was helpless to stop them. I also made it clear that I was quite fond of Mother despite her overprotectiveness and that I hoped Ellen eventually would learn to love her too. I said I realized that might be difficult in view of what her initial impression of Mother must be.

Ellen surprised me by laughing.



"I think the whole thing is charming," she said. "She's merely trying to watch over her little boy."

"But you certainly must resent the thought of being investigated," I said.

She shrugged. "My life is an open book. The only emotion your mother is likely to experience while reading the report is boredom." Then she had a sudden thought which brought a delighted grin to her face. "Let's beat her to the punch. You hire the agency to investigate me and hand her the report at the same time you tell her we're going to be married."

"Don't be ridiculous," I said. "I'm not going to insult you by hiring a detective agency to investigate your suitability as a wife."

"I'm going to be investigated in any event," she pointed out. "I should think the fee would be a lot lower if I cooperate. Besides, even though I won't see it, I am already contemplating with enjoyment the surprised look that is bound to appear on your mother's face when you hand her the report."

Against my better judgment Ellen eventually talked me into accepting her suggestion. We went together to the New York City office of the Flynn Detective Agency, where we explained to a

man named Morrison what we wanted.

When we finished, Morrison said, "Now let me understand this, Mr. Loudan. You want to forestall your mother's engaging us to do an investigation in depth by having us make a cursory investigation that will turn up nothing derogatory about the young lady?"

"Wrong," Ellen told him. "He wants the same sort of investigation you would have made for his mother. Anything derogatory you learn is to be included in the report. If it will help, I will list all of my bad habits before you start."

After examining her curiously, Morrison said in a polite tone, "That won't be necessary, Miss Whittier. We prefer to come to our own conclusions about our subjects' habits."

In due course I received a thick report. Mother had shown me only the pertinent parts of previous reports, and I hadn't realized how comprehensive they were. Every phase of Ellen's life from birth on was covered. Scores of people who knew her, ranging from relatives and close friends to mere acquaintances, had been interviewed.

Her choice of boyfriends prior to me had been impeccable, I noted. The investigators had



unearthed only three regular ones. The earliest, when she was fourteen, had been an Eagle Scout. The second, a summer romance when she was seventeen, had been the son of a New England senator. During her first two years at Columbia she had gone with a philosophy student who had since transferred to a Presbyterian seminary, where he was studying for the ministry.

According to the report, she was in excellent physical health except for an occasional touch of insomnia. The note about her insomnia impressed me with the Flynn Detective Agency's thoroughness, because until then I had been unaware of it.

The only blemishes the investigators had been able to uncover on an otherwise spotless record were that Ellen had once played hooky in the sixth grade and that at seventeen she had been arrested for speeding.

When Ellen read the report, her main reaction, like mine, was awe at its thoroughness. "They even dug up my criminal record," she said. "Do you think your mother will decide it makes me ineligible?"

"She couldn't without being hypocritical," I told her. "I have often heard Mother relate with relish how she and a high-school

girlfriend alternately cut English class for a whole term by answering roll calls for each other. And at last count she had fourteen speeding tickets."

Mother was currently playing the Town Casino in Buffalo, and was staying at the Statler Hotel there. The weekend after receiving the report, Ellen and I flew to Buffalo together. I phoned to let Mother know I was coming, but didn't mention that I was bringing a girl.

We checked into adjoining rooms at the Statler about six p.m. on Saturday. As Mother had an eight p.m. dinner show, I knew she would be resting up for it in her suite. As soon as we were settled, I went to see her alone.

Mother, as always, was delighted to see me. She gave me a hug and a smack on the cheek, then laughed and ran to the bathroom for some facial tissue to wipe the lipstick off my cheek.

"You're looking wonderful, Francis," she said as she rubbed away. "You've certainly grown into a handsome young man."

"Thank you, Mother," I said. "You're looking wonderful, as usual, too."

I wasn't just offering flattery. Mother was an extraordinarily attractive woman in a regal sort of way.

Bunching the tissue into a ball and tossing it into a wastebasket, Mother waved me to a chair and gracefully sank into another. "Sit down and tell me everything you've been doing, dear. Are you keeping your grades up? Whatever is that you're carrying?" She referred to the thick manila envelope under my right arm.

"My grades are fine," I said. "It's a report from the Flynn Detective Agency on a girl named Ellen Whittier—the girl I'm going to marry."

Mother's eyebrows peaked in mild astonishment. "You had her investigated?"

"I thought I would save you the trouble."

I removed the report from its envelope, walked over and laid it in her lap. She glanced down at it, then looked up at me with a bemused expression.

"Do I sense a touch of belligerence in your tone, dear?"

"Not at all, Mother. It's simply that I knew you would have her investigated, and decided to expedite matters. Ellen knows about it. As a matter of fact, it was her suggestion."

"How quaint," Mother said somewhat dryly. "You mean you explained to her that I would have her investigated if you didn't?"

"Well, yes. Yes, I told her."

"That must have given her a fine impression of me."

"It seemed to amuse her more than offend her. Actually she has no impression of you as yet. She is reserving opinion until she meets you."

"Decent of her," Mother remarked in the same dry tone.

"Incidentally, that is not a whitewash report designed to discourage you from having one of your own made. We stipulated to the agency representative that absolutely nothing be left out."

"I see. Will you get my purse from the bedroom, dear? The black one on the dresser. It has my reading glasses in it."

I got the purse, Mother put on her glasses and began to read the report. I took a chair opposite her.

"Twenty years old, I see," Mother commented. "Just right for you. I think it's nice for a man to be at least a year older."

As this comment seemed to require no reply, I remained silent.

A moment later she said, "Oh, she's *that* Whittier family. The congressman's daughter. You didn't mention she was from down our way."

"She isn't, exactly. Her father is a cattleman as well as a congressman, you know, and the ranch is

in the mountains up near the Los Padres National Forest. Ellen says you get to it by a narrow unpaved road called Sulphur Mountain Road, which is up somewhere around Ojai. And Ojai must be close to a hundred miles from Beverly Hills."

Mother read on. Her next remark was, "She can hardly be a fortune hunter, like that Harmon girl. Hugh Whittier must be quite well off."

"His assets are listed on the next page, Mother. They total around fourteen million."

"How nice. I note that the family is also Presbyterian."

"I thought that would please you."

She continued to read, making no further comments until she had finished the report. Then she laid it on an end table next to her chair, replaced her reading glasses in her purse and gave me a warm smile.

"She sounds like an eminently suitable young lady, dear. When do you plan the wedding?"

"This June, after graduation. Ellen still has another year of school, but that will be no problem, because we plan to live in New York City. I hope to have a stage manager's job by next fall."

Mother raised her eyebrows. "I thought you planned to produce

and direct your own plays, dear."

"I do, eventually. I want to accumulate some experience first."

"I see. When do I get to meet Ellen?"

"Right now, if you wish," I said. "I brought her along."

Mother looked pleasantly surprised. "How nice. Where did you leave her?"

"We have adjoining rooms on the sixth floor."

Glancing at her watch, Mother said, "I like to get to the club about a half hour before show time, but I can spare about fifteen minutes."

Mother's suite was on the fourth floor. We went upstairs to the sixth and I knocked on Ellen's door. It opened immediately.

For a brief moment the two women regarded each other with the estimating, calculating expressions common to potential in-laws on first meeting. Then both smiled warmly, I made introductions, and Ellen invited us in.

As I closed the door behind us, Mother said, "You're quite pretty, Ellen. I'm glad, because I've always hoped for handsome grandchildren."

"Thank you," Ellen said. "Will you sit down?"

"I haven't time, because I have an eight o'clock show and I like to get to the club a half hour

early. I just stopped by long enough to meet you and welcome you into the family."

"Well, thank you again."

"I understand Francis explained to you my habit of having his fiancées investigated. I won't apologize for it, because you wouldn't be the lucky girl to get him if it were not for that habit. He would already be unhappily married."

Ellen's eyes twinkled. "I know about both previous engagements. No apology is necessary, Mrs. Loudan. I am in your debt."

"Please call me Miriam," Mother said.

"All right, Miriam," Ellen agreed.

When Mother left a few moments later and I had closed the door behind her, I said to Ellen, "Well, what do you think?"

"I rather like her," Ellen told me. "I got the impression she approves of me."

"What mother wouldn't?" I asked, going over to kiss her on the nose.

We decided to catch Mother's early show. I phoned her suite, caught her before she left for the Town Casino, and also arranged to have a late dinner with her after the show.

Mother had a ringside table reserved for us when we arrived at the nightclub. I could tell by the

way Ellen squeezed my hand that she was deeply impressed by Mother's entrance. I was impressed myself. Mother possessed such remarkable stage presence that she established instant rapport with her audiences. Tonight, before ever opening her mouth, she drew enthusiastic applause merely by throwing the audience a welcoming smile.

I think a good part of her appeal was that she had none of the brittle professionalism common to nightclub performers. Instead, she gave the impression of being a relaxed, aristocratic but gracious hostess who was performing for her invited guests only because she loved to entertain.

As usual, Mother picked six volunteers from the audience, put them into hypnotic trances, then ordered them to do various ridiculous things, such as bark like dogs, quack like ducks and honk like geese. One couple, informed by her that they were Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, did a waltz creditable enough to draw heavy applause after they had admitted being only average dancers. She told another pair they were in a snowstorm, and the manner in which they huddled together, shivering and blinking imaginary snowflakes from their eyes, made the audience howl.

After the show, during dinner, Mother asked Ellen if she had yet informed her parents of our engagement.

"No," Ellen said. "I plan to tell them over Easter vacation. That's only two weeks off."

When Mother learned that Ellen and I would be flying from New York to Los Angeles together, she seemed delighted.

"I'll be back home even before you two get there," Mother said. "My engagement here ends next Saturday, and I've informed my agent I don't want another booking until after Easter. Can you spend some time with us, Ellen?"

"Not until the last couple of days of Easter vacation, I'm afraid," Ellen said apologetically. "Francis and I won't be arriving in Los Angeles until about noon Saturday, and of course I want to get to the ranch before Easter. I plan to rent a car at the airport and drive straight there. Dad and Mom are returning to Washington a couple of days before I have to fly back, though, so I can visit you then."

Mother gave me a worried look. "You're not planning to spend your vacation at the ranch too, are you, dear?"

"Just one day," I assured her. "I'll spend Easter with you, then drive up on Monday to meet El-

len's parents, and return the next day."

"Oh," she said in a relieved tone.

I said to Ellen, "Why do you have to leave for the ranch directly from the airport? It can't be much more than about an hour and a half drive, so you would get there early in the evening even if you stayed over for dinner. I would like you to meet Dad."

"Oh, yes," Mother said with an air of resignation. "You must meet Francis' dear father."

"I want to," Ellen said. "I suppose I could wait over a few hours."

Two weeks later Ellen and I landed at Los Angeles International Airport at ten minutes before noon. Since Ellen had arranged to have a rental car waiting for her, there was no one at the airport to meet us. There was a message awaiting us at the call desk, however. It was from Mother; we were to meet her and my father for lunch at the Beverly Hilton Hotel at twelve-thirty.

That didn't give us a great deal of leeway, as the airport is a considerable distance from Beverly Hills. Nevertheless we managed to arrive a few minutes early.

Exactly at twelve-thirty the two of them came in together. I could tell by Ellen's expression that she

was impressed by Dad the moment she saw him moving across the lobby toward us. He was as handsome a man as Mother was a woman, and just as aristocratic-looking. Tall and lean and as erect as a career soldier, he had the man-of-distinction's gray at the temples, yet gave an instant impression of warmth and friendliness. Mother always said it was a false front designed to conceal from his hundred-dollar-an-hour patients that he was as neurotic as they were, but I always felt that he *was* warm and friendly.

Dad didn't wait for introductions. Smiling broadly, he said, "Hi, future daughter," took Ellen by the shoulders and kissed her on the forehead. At the same moment Mother planted a kiss on my cheek.

Looking flustered but pleased, Ellen said, "Hi, future father." Then Dad was thrusting his hand at me and saying, "Good to see you, son."

"Good to see you too, Dad," I said sincerely.

We had the smorgasbord lunch in the Starlight Room. Dad was obviously delighted with my choice of a wife, and Ellen was equally delighted with him. They had little time to get acquainted, though, because Dad had to eat and run to make a one-thirty

group therapy session at the local Veterans Administration Hospital, where he donated his time on Saturdays. Mother had invited him to dinner, however, so Ellen would see him again before she left.

Mother had driven to the hotel in her little roadster. After lunch Ellen and I followed her home in the rented car.

Our house was only a few blocks from the Beverly Hilton. We still lived in the mansion my maternal grandfather had built when he was head of one of Hollywood's major studios. To friends who asked Mother why she continued to hang onto such a huge place, particularly since in recent years she was away so much of the time, she defensively pointed out that modern tract houses were jerry-built and that she hated apartment living. This was no real answer to the question, of course, but Mother seemed to regard it as adequate.

I think Ellen was more nonplussed than impressed by the three stories and twenty-four rooms, particularly when she learned that the only servants were a cleaning woman who came in twice a week when we were in residence and a handyman who took care of the gardening. I explained that Mother hung onto it because she had grown up there

and she had a tendency to resist change.

Mother had a roast with potatoes and carrots all ready to cook, so the only meal preparation she had to do after we got home was to turn on the oven. The three of us spent the afternoon just sitting in the oversized front room before the empty fireplace, talking.

Ordinarily, I imagine prospective mothers-in-law ask lots of polite questions about the backgrounds of prospective daughters-in-law, but the Flynn Detective Agency had made that unnecessary in this case. The conversation remained largely impersonal except for one question on Mother's part. She was curious about the mention of insomnia that had appeared in the agency's report.

"It's nothing serious," Ellen told her. "It's what our family doctor calls 'situational insomnia.' That is, I only suffer it from some immediate cause, such as the night Francis asked me to marry him. I couldn't sleep a wink."

"That's understandable," Mother said. "I couldn't sleep the night I got the news either."

"Then I always have trouble when there is a change in environment. I won't be able to sleep tonight, and when I get back to school I'll be awake all the first

night too." She laughed softly.

Mother started to say something, but stopped as a thought occurred to her, and looked at Ellen thoughtfully. "I can make you sleep tonight, dear. By post-hypnotic suggestion. It's more effective than a sleeping pill."

"Really?" Ellen said, interested. "How does it work?"

"While you are in a hypnotic trance I will tell you that at such-and-such a time tonight you will fall asleep. When I wake you, you will have no recollection of the order, but your subconscious will. Tonight you will fall asleep at the precise time I ordered you to. A word of caution, though: you *must* be in bed, prepared to go to sleep, at least fifteen minutes beforehand, because you will fall asleep when the time comes, no matter what you are doing—even taking a shower."

"Eleven p.m. would be a safe time," Ellen said. "That's my normal bedtime, and I know there is no party or anything scheduled at the ranch tonight that might keep me up later."

"All right," Mother said. "Want me to do it?"

"I'd love it. I didn't get much sleep last night either, anticipating the trip."

Mother went to get the star sapphire pendant she always uses



in her act, dangled it in front of Ellen's face and told her to concentrate on it. Ellen proved to be an easy subject, and within minutes was in a deep hypnotic trance. Mother gave her the post-hypnotic order to fall asleep at exactly eleven that night, then clapped her hands and woke her.

"Now I have implanted an order in your subconscious to go to sleep exactly at eleven," Mother told her. "Please remember that you *must* be in bed at that time. If for some reason you haven't reached home by that time—because of engine trouble, for instance—you will have to rent a motel room and get to bed. Understand?"

"I understand," Ellen said.

At five o'clock Mother told me to go make a pitcher of martinis and put them in the freezer, as she had told Dad to be there at five-fifteen. She wanted to serve dinner no later than six, she said, so that Ellen could be on the road by seven.

Dad arrived on time, and Mother managed to get dinner on the table at a quarter to six. We finished in sufficient time for Ellen to help clear the table, which she insisted on doing. It was only five of seven when I walked out to the car with Ellen.

When I leaned in the window

to kiss her good-bye, she said, "You have the ranch phone number, in case something happens that you can't drive up Monday?"

"I have it, but nothing will happen."

"I hope you like my parents' as much as I like yours."

"I'm sure I will."

"Do you love me?"

"I'm nuts about you."

"Then I'll see you Monday," she said, smiling at me and shifting into drive.

When I got back inside I found Dad seated in what had been his favorite chair in the front room, smoking his pipe. Mother said they were going to have a second cup of coffee, and asked if I wanted one too. When I said yes, she asked me to pour brandy for all of us while she was getting the coffee.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later, as we were finishing our brandy and coffee, that Dad remarked contentedly, "Ellen seems like a fine girl, son. You're very lucky."

"She's faultless," I said. "Except for situational insomnia."

"And how do you know that?" he asked with raised brows.

I grinned at him. "Not the way your evil mind is surmising. It's only an occasional thing, anyway. She'll sleep tonight because



Mother put her under and gave her the posthypnotic order to fall asleep at eleven."

Dad gave Mother a quizzical glance, reached for his nearly empty brandy glass, then suddenly stiffened. His gaze shot at Mother. "Just exactly how did you phrase your posthypnotic order, Miriam?"

She looked surprised at his tone. "Why, I just told her to fall asleep at exactly eleven tonight."

Coming to his feet, Dad asked in a flat tone, "Haven't you ever heard of circadian rhythm?"

For a moment I missed the urgency in his voice. With amiable fatuousness I said, "Circadian

rhythm: the inner clock that tells us when we need to sleep and when we need to awake. Physiology II, in my junior year."

Ignoring me, Dad said to Mother, "Didn't it occur to you that when she woke up this morning, she was on the East Coast? Her body may not adjust for days. She'll go to sleep when it's eleven p.m. in New York, which is roughly forty minutes from now."

It registered on me then that his calm tone concealed a desperation approaching panic. I looked at Mother and saw that she was staring at him with enormous eyes. All at once I became almost dizzy with fear for Ellen. In forty minutes she would still be traveling on the freeway at high speed. If in her eagerness to get home she exceeded the speed limit by ten miles an hour, she might even be on Sulphur Mountain Road, which she had described as a narrow, winding road with sheer drop-offs at some points.

In either event she couldn't possibly get home by eight p.m.

Dad swung toward me. "What route did she take?" he asked quietly.

I gave my head a helpless shake. "We didn't discuss it. The San Diego Freeway, I imagine. That would be closer than driving clear over to catch the Hollywood

Freeway. She might have taken the Coast Highway, though."

Dad looked at Mother. "Did she mention to you which route she was taking?"

Mother numbly shook her head.

Dad strode to the phone, dialed the operator and crisply told her to get him the highway patrol. After a short wait he said in the same crisp tone, "This is Dr. Philip Loudan. I am a local psychiatrist. With whom am I speaking, did you say?"

After a pause he resumed, "A young lady named Ellen Whittier is at this moment en route from Beverly Hills to a ranch on Sulphur Mountain Road, which comes off Route thirty-three this side of Ojai. Do you know where that is, Sergeant?"

After another pause, he said, "Right, beyond Casitas Springs. She left here about five of seven and we believe she is traveling on the San Diego Freeway, although we aren't sure. I haven't time to explain how and why this happened, but she was placed under hypnosis just before she left and was given the posthypnotic order to fall asleep at eight p.m. She *will* fall asleep at precisely that time, and if she isn't stopped first, the probability is that she will be driving at high speed at the time."

There was a short silence, then, "Yes, I am quite sure. I haven't time to give a lecture on hypnosis over the phone, so I am afraid you will just have to take it on faith."

He listened again, then said, "I don't know, but my son is here and he can tell you. Just a moment."

Handing the phone to me, he said, "The man's name is Sergeant Johnson. He wants a description of Ellen's car."

I said into the phone; "This is Francis Loudan, Sergeant. The car is a brand-new blue-and-white two-door Ford sedan. It's a rental car and I don't know the license number."

"That's all right," a pleasant voice said in my ear. "We'll just stop every car headed that way that answers the description. You reasonably certain she took the San Diego Freeway?"

"No, she could have taken the Coast Highway. But the freeway is faster, because you don't have to slow down for all those towns. I don't think she would have picked the Hollywood Freeway, because we're in the far west end of Beverly Hills."

"Seems unlikely," the sergeant agreed. "I wouldn't rule out the Coast Highway, though. Be a lot of holiday traffic tonight, and she

may have figured it would be faster in the long run than the freeway. It would be if the freeway gets really jammed."

"Well, can you check both routes?"

"We'll check all three, just in case she took the Hollywood Freeway for some reason. Give me your phone number and I'll call you back as soon as there's news."

I gave him the number.

After I hung up, I started pacing the room. Mother and Dad sat silently watching me for a time, then Mother went to make more coffee. Dad relit his pipe.

At five of eight I stopped pacing to stare at the phone. At eight I gave a little shudder and went over to the bar to pour myself another shot of brandy. I had a third brandy at eight-fifteen and a fourth at eight-thirty.

The phone rang at a quarter to nine. I caught it in the middle of the first ring.

"Sergeant Johnson here," the pleasant voice said. "This the doctor or the son?"

"Francis," I said. "The son."

"Well, we found her, and you can stop worrying. Just in the nick of time, though."

I let out a relieved sigh. Cupping my hand over the phone, I said, "She's all right." Then into

the phone I said, "Where was she?"

"On the Coast Highway, just pulling into Oxnard. There's no road divider there, so she could have crashed head-on into somebody if she had fallen asleep driving. It's blind luck we caught her at the exact moment we did, because it was almost eight when a patrol car pulled her over. The officer was just asking her if she was Ellen Whittier when she fell sound asleep."

I felt my stomach constrict at the closeness of it. "Where is she?" I asked.

"At St. John's Hospital in Oxnard."

"In the hospital!" I said sharply. "I thought you said she was all right."

"She's just asleep. Nobody knew whether or not it would be dangerous to wake her, because hypnosis can be pretty tricky stuff. So they just put her in the hospital and let her sleep. Her car is at the Oxnard Police Station."

"Oh," I said. "Have her parents been informed?"

"We don't know who her parents are."

They wouldn't, I realized, because all their information about Ellen had come from Dad and me. I said, "I'll take care of it, then. Thanks a lot, Sergeant."

"Just a minute," he said. "I want to talk to your father."

It developed that what he wanted from Dad was an explanation of just how Ellen's predicament had come about. Dad gave a detailed account of what had happened. When he hung up, he said with a grin that apparently Sergeant Johnson wanted to make sure it hadn't been some kind of exotic murder attempt.

I phoned Ellen's parents to let them know she wouldn't be there that night. They knew who I was, because Ellen had written about me, even though they were not yet aware that we planned to marry. It took a considerable amount of explaining to convince Ellen's father that she was unhurt, even though she was in a hospital, but I finally got across to him what had happened. Then I let him talk to Dad, who elaborated on my explanation.

Apparently in answer to a question by Congressman Whittier as to whether Dad thought he and his wife should drive to the hospital, Dad said, "It would be pretty pointless. She'll wake up as soon as her body has had its normal requirement of sleep. If that is eight hours, she'll be rising about four in the morning. She has her own car, so she can just drive on. If I were you, I would just sit tight

until she arrives, instead of making a useless twenty or thirty-mile trip."

When he hung up, I said, "Useless or not, I'm driving up to Oxnard."

Dad regarded me curiously. "Why?"

"So that I can explain to her what happened as soon as she wakes up. I feel responsible for letting Mother hypnotize her."

A trifle dryly Dad said, "Why don't you just phone St. John's Hospital and leave a message asking Ellen to call back as soon as she awakens?"

I felt myself redden slightly. That easy alternative hadn't even occurred to me. I took the suggestion.

When I hung up after leaving the message, Mother said, "You shouldn't feel responsibility for what happened, Francis. It was my error. The factor of circadian rhythm should have occurred to me."

"Yes, I think it should have," Dad agreed. "We covered it when I taught you hypnotism."

"That was over twenty years ago," she protested with a frown. Then she passed a hand over her eyes. "The excitement has me exhausted. Please go home, Philip, because I want to go to bed."

As soon as Dad left, we both

went to bed. Although it was only about ten p.m. in Beverly Hills, according to my circadian rhythm it was one in the morning.

Ellen's call came at four a.m. local time. As I put the phone to my ear, I heard a click and knew that Mother had lifted her bedside extension phone too.

"Hello?" I said.

"Hi," Ellen's voice said in my ear. "You must still be up, you answered so fast."

"It's a bedside phone. Are you all right?"

"Just fine. Pretty weird, wasn't it? The nurses here told me what happened, but I don't quite understand why it happened."

"Your body is still on East Coast time. Eleven o'clock there is only eight here."

"Oh," she said. "I would never have thought of that."

"We didn't either. Mother and I, I mean. Dad did, though, the moment we mentioned it to him. That's why we set the cops on you. I nearly had heart failure waiting for news. We didn't even know which route you had taken."

Ellen said in a surprised voice, "Your mother knew. I told her while we were scraping dishes and putting them in the dishwasher."

I let several seconds tick by in silence before I said, "She must

have forgotten. I think she's listening in. Did you, Mother?"

Several more seconds passed before Mother said apologetically, "I don't remember it, Ellen. I have an unfortunate habit of sometimes not listening because I'm thinking of something else. Probably I was plotting how to get Francis to take me to church in the morning."

I am sure Ellen noticed nothing unusual about Mother's voice, but I could detect the slightest change of inflection in it, and I knew that beneath her forced naturalness she was quaking with terror. She could detect the slightest change of inflection in my voice too, you see.

When Ellen rang off a few moments later, I got up, put on my robe and went down the hall to Mother's room. When I knocked, she called for me to come in.

She had expected me, because she was seated on the edge of her bed with a robe over her nightgown. Halting in the doorway, I gazed at her steadily. She turned a brittle smile in my direction,

but her gaze went past me to the door pushed back against the wall.

I said quietly, "I would hate to lose either my mother or the woman I love. But if I had lost the one, I would have lost both."

Her smile became even more brittle as she concentrated on the door with increased intensity.

"I love you, Mother," I said. "But in a different way I love Ellen just as much. A man shouldn't be forced to choose between the two types of love."

The fixed smile faded and her eyes misted. "Yes, a man," she said, nearly inaudibly. "No longer a boy." Taking a deep breath, she forced herself to look at me. "May I have another chance?"

"I told you I love you."

She nodded. "Thank you, dear. You are very understanding."

"Yes," I agreed. "Good night."

Actually I was more understanding than she imagined. I could easily have killed her simply by telling her she had lost my love. I am quite sure I would have found her dead in the morning.





*Infallibility may be a difficult thing to keep going.*



No  
Small  
Mistakes

Neal Corder was a perfectionist. He tried to do everything so flawlessly that the possibility of error was all but eliminated. He had always exercised this capacity for taking great pains, so it wasn't really his fault that he was sent to the State Asylum for the Criminally Insane when he was twenty years old.

The police had been fools. Neal had killed his parents with a

woodsman's ax, scattering the various parts of their bodies throughout the house. The crime was so wildly insane that Neal was sure the police would immediately search for a maniac. They did, but they confined their investigation to a far narrower group than Neal Corder had expected—and redheaded Detective First Grade William McCarry had pinned the crime on Neal.

The crazy murder method Neal Corder had chosen hadn't kept him from being suspected, but it did save his life. Instead of being tried for the crimes, he was sent to the asylum. There he marked time, dreaming of escape and revenge against the detective who had found him out.

Unfortunately, escape from the asylum was impossible. There were almost as many guards as there were inmates, and Neal was watched constantly. However, as soon as the state abolished the

A. F. Oreshnik

death penalty, he worked to convince the doctors that he wasn't really crazy. Then he promptly pleaded guilty to the murders and was shipped to the state prison with a life sentence.

Neal Corder had been certain the state prison would be less secure than the asylum and he was right. In the first week inside the walls, he thought of half a dozen workable escape plans. All but one would have required the assistance of other convicts, though, so he concentrated on the one he could accomplish unaided—an escape tunnel from a corner of the prison chapel, the least-used building inside the walls.

The plan worked every bit as perfectly as Neal Corder had known it would. He completed the tunnel in March, but waited patiently for the hot summer months and the prison riot he expected before using it. A riot was certain to disrupt prison routine, giving him far more than the few hours' head start he could expect otherwise. As it turned out, the prison was in turmoil for three days, and Neal Corder was a thousand miles away before he was missed.

Detective McCarry was the one who had found him out, and Neal Corder had long before vowed to get even. He could no longer re-

call exactly why he'd killed his parents, only that Detective McCarry had caused him to be locked up. Neal was certain this was more provocation than he'd had for the murders.

Detective McCarry had had a picture of his wife and twin sons on his desk. A man with a family is always vulnerable. He should have known better than to cause trouble for Neal. He had a wife. He had sons. Didn't he know Neal would be angry? Well, he'd soon find out.

The boys would be about twelve years old now, and Neal had been thinking about them for a long time. He had plans for them that would cause a lot of problems for the medical examiner. It would be like trying to separate the pieces of two identical jigsaw puzzles that have been mixed together. Whose heart? Whose liver? Whose eye? The medical examiner would never get it sorted-out.

First, however, Neal Corder needed money and a new identity. Money was of primary importance. After crawling out of the ground outside the prison, he stumbled along a railroad track all night to reach the nearest city. He let himself into the basement of a large apartment building and broke into the row of coin-oper-

ated washing machines and dryers he found there. One dryer had a load of clothes in it, and he helped himself to a pair of jeans and a tan sport shirt that weren't too badly wrinkled. He disposed of his mud-caked prison denims in the nearest trash barrel. So far, so good.

Next, he found a restaurant that catered to the early-morning trade and bought himself a huge breakfast. He ate slowly, enjoying the food, and sipped three cups of steaming coffee before walking the streets, waiting for the stores to open. When they did, he bought a hunting knife with an eight-inch blade and threw away the homemade weapon he'd brought from the prison. A man with a good sharp knife can always get money. He'd learned that and a few other things inside the walls.

That evening he climbed aboard a bus with enough money to last him for several weeks. He'd had to use the knife a couple of times, but he didn't think he'd be suspected—he'd made it look like the work of a lunatic, and there was nothing wrong with his mind. Just the opposite—he was far too clever for the police.

Neal Corder didn't stop traveling until he was a thousand miles from the prison, and he saw a

newspaper story which told that his escape had been discovered. Now he could no longer travel without papers. With a manhunt on, there was always a chance that someone would ask him for identification.

True, he didn't look like any of the pictures the police had. When he had arrived at the prison, he'd stood five feet nine and weighed 250 pounds, but he soon realized that his size was a handicap. For every pound he weighed, he'd have to move hundreds of pounds of extra earth when he dug the escape tunnel. He'd gone on a crash diet—slimming down was the only logical thing to do—and he now weighed 150 pounds and had a long, narrow face with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. He bore no resemblance to the round-faced prison escapee on the front pages of all the newspapers.

He bought used luggage and took a suite of rooms in a first-class hotel. He placed an ad in the newspaper and spent the next four days interviewing applicants for a nonexistent job. Finally, he found a man who was his height and weight and only two years older than himself. The man, John Eastern, had brown hair and blue eyes, the same as he did. Corder found out everything there was to know about John Eastern, and

then he let him leave. He had thought of killing him, but decided against it. It would be better if there were two live John Easterns, rather than a live one and a dead one.

Corder moved from the hotel and rented a furnished room as John Eastern. Next, he notified the post office of John Eastern's change of address so that all of the real John Eastern's mail would come to him at the furnished room. The next step was to apply for duplicates of John Eastern's birth certificate, driver's license, Social Security card, and military discharge.

While waiting for the identification papers to arrive, he followed the manhunt in the newspapers with wry humor. The search never came any closer to him than 200 miles. He was the chief suspect for the crimes in the city near the prison, but there were no living witnesses, so the authorities couldn't be sure. The way the police were fumbling about, while he was moving steadily toward his goal, made him want to laugh.

One evening as he was returning to his room after delivering mail to John Eastern's mailbox—he didn't keep bills, circulars or personal letters—he passed a surplus store that had a machine for em-

bossing dog tags. The machine was usually used to put clever sayings on the tags, but he went inside and had a pair made that were identical to the ones John Eastern had worn in the service. Many men wear their dog tags long after they leave the service, so he hung one from a chain around his neck and placed the second one in his wallet. His transition from Neal Corder to John Eastern was now complete.

The dog tags carried John Eastern's name, service number, his blood type and the letter C. This last designated his religion—Catholic. Neal Corder knew nothing about the Catholic Church, so he bought a book on the subject and studied it. He was a perfectionist. Short of taking his fingerprints, no one was ever going to be able to tell he wasn't John Eastern. Also, hiding behind the protection of the other man's identity, he'd have all the time he needed to get his revenge.

Detective McCarry had called him a fool, an intelligent fool. "You're too smart for your own good," he had said. "You have too much confidence in your intelligence. The result is, you don't make small mistakes, only big ones."

Well, if McCarry could see him now, he'd take that back. Neal

had been especially careful. He had been painfully thorough at every step of the way. He'd made no mistakes so far, and he wasn't going to make any later, either.

Neal Corder took the bus to his home town. When he got off, he had to pass two policemen who were stationed where they could observe all new arrivals. They didn't give him a second glance.

He found a room and rented a car. The next day he began to watch Detective McCarry's home. He didn't see the detective—McCarry was probably too busy with the manhunt to come home—but he did spot McCarry's twin sons.

He followed them to and from school the next two days so he could be sure of their route, then began to study it for the best place to force them into his car. The boys always cut through a vacant lot that had a billboard across the front of it. If he parked behind the sign, he could call the boys to the car as they passed and do anything else he wanted to do. It would be easy.

Neal Corder had to suffer through an entire weekend of anticipation. He was only able to think of the two boys and the

plans he had for them. By the time Monday morning arrived, his nerves were stretched tightly. That's why he raced his engine impatiently whenever he was stopped by a light, and that's why he shot forward a split second too soon at one of them and plowed into a car that was trying to cross his path as the light was changing.

Corder was rushed, bleeding and unconscious, to the nearest hospital. A doctor stopped the flow of blood, stitched his cuts, and applied bandages. Then, after glancing at Corder's dog tag, he ordered a transfusion—the normal procedure in cases of shock and blood loss.

The nurse was called away shortly after connecting the bottle to his arm. By the time anyone noticed he was having an adverse reaction, it was too late to do anything about it. His blood had clotted and the passages to his brain were already-plugged.

"How could it have happened?" the nurse wanted to know. "We're always so careful. How could he have been given the wrong blood type?"

The doctor was as confused as she was. "Someone must have made a mistake," he said.

*One's nightmares may end up fulfilling his daydreams.*



# The Wife Who Cried

**W**olf. The wolf!" Gordon Dempsey heard his wife cry. He snapped awake, jerking upright in bed to stare at her. She was writhing and moaning under the thin covers beside him, her slim body quivering and her hands curled into rigid fists. "The wolf!" she cried again. "The wolf!"

Dempsey reached for her, shaking her awake. There was a shudder and then she pulled herself away from him, crouching, fine blonde hair tangled around her shoulders, eyes overly large and fearful.

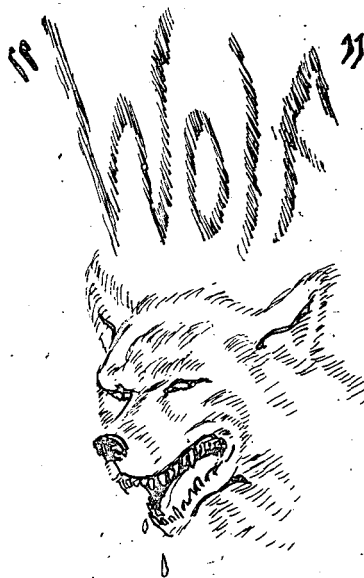
"Gordon . . ." Her whisper was tight and strained.

"You were having a nightmare."

"I . . . I dreamed that the—"

"Stop it, Vernal"

"But I did! It's back, Gordon, worse than before."



Her shoulders slumped and she swayed, eyes closing. Dempsey put an arm around her and drew her close, sensing her erratic pulse beat against his chest, and he

didn't know what to say. He searched for words, words to comfort her and make the nightmare go away, but the only sound came from the clock radio on the bedside table, its luminous dial reading three a.m. He'd been a policeman for nearly fifteen years, and

it frustrated him to feel so powerless now, so singularly helpless.

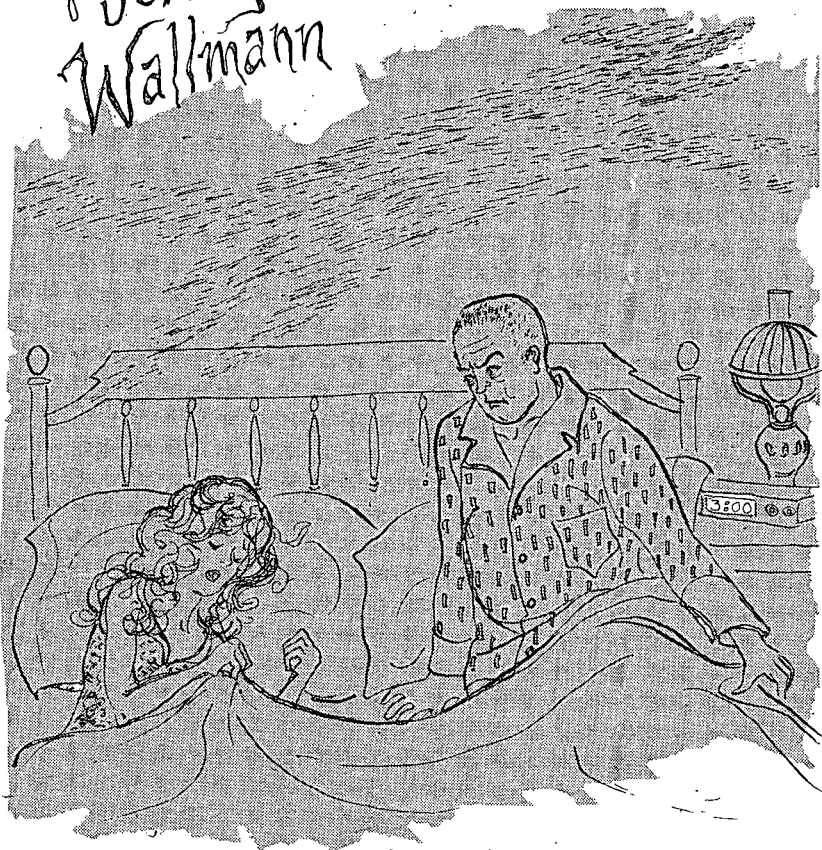
"It was waiting," she finally said, shivering.

"Not running?"

"No. This time it was just waiting, waiting between some boulders as if ready to pounce on something . . . somebody . . ."

He smoothed his hand over her

by Jeffrey M.  
Wallmann





damp, snarled hair. "Don't talk about it, Verna. It only gets you more upset."

"But it was so *real*. More real than a dream ought to be."

"Try to sleep. You're not going to dream again." He said it softly, assuredly. "No more dreams tonight."

Dempsey was a shortish man, becoming tubby with a beer belly, and his hair was clipped short to camouflage its gradual receding. After a while he stopped stroking his wife's hair and ran his hand through his own, then down along the bristle of his fleshy cheeks. His fingers drew over the carved lines of his mouth, around his stubby, broad nose that had once been broken, and past the deep-sunk trenches of his eyes to the creases of his forehead. The lines had no particular history; they were just there, the erosions of a cop's existence.

He thought Verna had drifted off again, more from exhaustion than his consoling, when she said in a blurred, dulled voice, "I . . . wish it didn't have to be this way. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said calmly, too calmly. "Hush now, and rest." He sensed the distance that was in his tone, and felt ashamed he couldn't seem to offer any more genuine concern for her than he would

give a strange victim of an accident or crime. He watched the shadows of the room, and Verna's pale face grew more peaceful, her flushed lips pressed against his arm, and he prayed the shallowness of his emotions would go undetected. It didn't seem fair, now that Verna needed him, that he had hardly more depth and substance than the wolf who prowled in her dreams. . . .

Dempsey drove to work sitting way back in the seat because his stomach got in the way, his arms straight and outstretched, grasping the wheel as if he were aiming the car, not steering it. Tall lines of ash and elm rose from the fields on either side of the road, the grasses stretching in breeze-whipped waves of bright yellow buttercups and white spumes of clover, and a Matisse sun glinting through overhead branches. It was an unblemished spring morning, and Dempsey loathed it. He would have preferred it chilled with rain and draped with fog. Then it would have matched his mood.

He was logy from lack of sleep, depressed and troubled. It was more than a matter of the wolf returning, or what it might ultimately mean. Her nightmare was showing up the greater illusion of

their marriage. The happy beginning had stretched thin and transparent over the twelve years they'd been together. He'd grown increasingly restive and disinterested, but not because of another girl; he'd simply bitten off more hearth-rug pie than he could swallow.

So he had held her last night out of affection—hell, he still *liked* Verna, if he no longer loved her—but mostly out of sympathy. He felt sorry for her. What kind of marriage was that?

At least it was better than the first time she'd started dreaming about the wolf. Then he'd laughed at her. That's the way it had been going, his discomfort expressed through hostility, and he'd kidded her the way the boys at the station would have ribbed him if they'd known. He should have told the lieutenant, though. He could see that now, in the light of what happened after the dreams had stopped. Well, now the wolf was back, and he'd *have* to brace the lieutenant with the story. No way to avoid it.

It was so weird, this deal about the wolf! It didn't make any sense, and Dempsey liked things to be methodical and orderly, not illogical and confusing as this—and he was suffering because of it.

He entered the small downtown

section of Tigard. There was the usual clutter of tire retreaders and taverns, then a row of shops with windows blank, like frames around missing pictures, and one chromium supermarket to prove Tigard knew all about progress. The street divided down by the Miami River, left to Cincinnati and right to Dayton, and the intersection was guarded by the statue of a Civil War general, his tunic riveted with road signs and his bird-limed sword brandished at the city hall. City hall was a grand old brick structure, its ground floor in back occupied by the police department.

Dempsey parked in the rear lot and walked through the scrolled oak doors. Inside was clean and waxed, with a slatted railing which bisected the room crosswise. It had the odor common to police stations and hospitals—disinfected and vaguely sterile, as if it loathed contact with humanity.

Since hardly anything happened during the mornings, the patrol was normally light, mostly out directing traffic. The officer of the day was sitting at the old PBX, listening with boredom to the chatter of static and voices which came out of the overhead speaker. The only other person there when Dempsey entered was Detective Paul Oxford, who was idly thumb-

ing through the log preparatory to signing off duty. He was Dempsey's opposite on the night shift, a few years younger and a perennial bachelor. There was a certain flair to him, very pressed of suit and shiny of shoe, every line about him quick and sensitive; his eyes brightly cynical in a face worn lean by experience. Dempsey liked the man.

"Morning, Gordy."

"Morning, Paul. The lieutenant in yet?"

"Yeah, he's here. Dinner still on for this evening?"

Dempsey faltered, last week's invitation having completely slipped his mind in the turmoil. Belatedly, he realized now that it wouldn't be fair to Verna to go through with it.

"I'm sorry, Paul, but we better put off tonight. Verna . . . hasn't been feeling too well."

"Sorry to hear that. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, no. Probably a touch of the flu that's going around."

"Everybody seems to be getting it." Oxford signed the log, then looked up again to smile understandingly. "Night's been quiet. Peabody got some kids breaking into a service station on 21st, but that's about all. Give my best to Verna, will you?"

"Sure, Paul, sure."

Dempsey stood watching until Oxford had left the station, feeling ashamed and vaguely irritated for having lied to his friend. Then he signed in, went through the gate in the railing and toward the first door on his right, nervously smoothing the lapels of his brown suit. He knocked once and entered.

In the middle of the room Lieutenant Kristovich was sitting, his jacket around the back of his chair and his shirt sleeves rolled up. He was a ferretlike man, with mousy gray hair and ears that stuck out, and at the moment he was playing solitaire. He nodded to Dempsey, raising his eyes but not his head.

"Morning. You look lousy."

"Haven't been sleeping well," Dempsey said, sitting down to the left of Kristovich. "Verna's been having nightmares."

"Too bad. We all get them now and then."

"Not like these." He shifted in the chair, favoring one side over the other because of the large Colt revolver on his right hip, and watched the lieutenant playing cards, again at a loss for words. He knew that whatever he said was going to come out sounding stupid.

At last he said, "Remember the jewelry store heist last month?"

"Sure. It's been keeping me awake nights."

"Verna dreamed about it—before it happened."

Kristovich paused with the king of diamonds. "*Before?*"

Dempsey nodded, struggling for the explanation. "A few nights before. She woke me, scared witless about this dream she'd had about a wolf running at her."

Kristovich moved the king to an empty row. "A wolf, eh?"

"A huge, snarling timber wolf. Then the next night the dream continued, like a movie serial, and the wolf ran past her and started loping up this steep mountain. I still didn't think much about it, not even the following night when she dreamed the wolf was coming back down the mountain, with a large canvas bag in its jaw. Well, then the next afternoon Alpine Jewelers was robbed."

"By a man wearing a wolf's-head mask and carrying a canvas bag." Kristovich slapped the deck of cards down on the table. "You're putting me on, Dempsey! You have to be!"

"So help me, I'm not."

"Mountain; Alpine Jewelers. Wolf; the guy with the mask. Even the canvas bag, no less." Kristovich picked up the deck and riffled it with disgust. "You believe it? Any of it?"

"I don't go in for that kind of stuff much. But Verna—"

"Yeah, yeah. My wife is nuts, over astrology. Damn it, though, why didn't you tell me this before?"

"It seemed just coincidence. I couldn't see what good it'd do; I mean like helping to catch the thief or something."

"Well, then why are you telling me now?"

"Because Verna's starting to dream again."

"No." Kristovich stared gloomily at the cards, then up at Dempsey's worried face. "No, I'm not buying it."

"It's the truth! She was moaning and shaking in bed last night, yelling, 'The wolf! The wolf!'"

"Doing what? No chance it's shedding its pelt so we can identify the guy who held up Alpine, is there?"

"Come on, Lieutenant, I know it sounds foolish."

"Crazy."

"It was crouching in some rocks this time. Maybe she'll dream some more. I hope not. It probably doesn't mean anything anyway."

"Precognition," Kristovich muttered darkly. "Next thing I know, we'll have a tea-leaf reader in the department." He dealt himself a black queen, placed it on the king

and moved the row headed by his jack, all with slow rumination. Wrinkles, like fingers, stretched his eyes. "However," he said, "you better keep me posted."

The sun was an orange cloud, the sky a glittering haze of evening by the time Dempsey drove into his driveway. The day had been peaceful, a few domestic spat and some drunk drivers but no real crime, yet he felt haggard and chafed. Just coming home drained him. His was the last house on Laurel Lane, a red frame rectangle with a tacked-on screen porch and a treeless front yard that had brown patches, courtesy of the neighbor's spaniel. Then came the overstuffed discount-house furniture, a wheezy refrigerator and a television that needed work. It was enough to drag any man down, and he wondered how Verna could stand it all day long.

She was in the open doorway of the porch, her face slender and smooth as the rest of her body. "I saw the doctor today," she told him when he reached her.

"And?"

"I'm nervous. Isn't that a big surprise? He prescribed some pills to help me sleep." They walked into the livingroom together, and it was then that Dempsey saw

that her face was contorted into a hemstitched grimace which was meant to be a smile. "Gordon, that's all it is, isn't it?"

"Of course it is."

"I . . . I'm not going mad?"

"No, not at all." She searched his face for assurance, and he added, "You dreamed that a wolf ran up a mountain, then by chance a man wearing a wolf mask held up Alpine Jewelers, and now you're putting two and two together and getting five. You're letting your imagination work overtime, that's all."

"I can almost sense it when I'm awake," she said, and her eyes darted to the corners of the room. "I'm beginning to feel the wolf stalking me."

"I'm telling you, Verna, you're letting coincidence run away with you. Why, even Kristovich said—"

"You told this to your lieutenant?"

"Easy, easy, it was only a couple of words. I thought he might be interested, seeing as he hasn't cracked the robbery yet, and it's like he says. You can't believe dreams foretell the future any more than you can accept Ouija boards and crystal balls."

"Ouija—!" She sucked in her breath, the slight twist of truth to his explanation upsetting her more than ever. "So that's how you

think it is! You snickered at me before, and you're still making fun of me! You've got everybody making fun of me! Putting me down, always putting me down, and trying to . . . to . . ." She suddenly pressed her hands to her face, murmuring something which Dempsey could not hear and wasn't sure he wanted to. He stared over her blonde head and awkwardly patted her back.

In the faint dawn hours she began to cry softly, a lonely, distant sound which tore at Dempsey beside her. He turned over and shook her as he had the night before.

"Verna!"

She shivered convulsively, her eyes opening with a drugged slowness that scared him. "What? What?" she said as if drunk.

"You've been dreaming again. Damn, I thought those pills were supposed to make you sleep!"

She didn't respond at once. When she did, her voice was husky and thick. "They worked too well. I couldn't wake up. The wolf was back, and I kept telling myself it was only a dream and I'd wake up—only I didn't."

Dempsey switched on the bedside lamp and studied the glassy blue eyes that were almost hidden beneath his wife's swollen lids. "This has got to stop," he said in-

tensely. "Do you hear me, Verna?"

"I'm not taking any more of those pills," she said. "I want to wake up when it gets too bad. The wolf was—"

"No more! Not another word! I don't care if you can see the future or have eyes in back of your head! It's got to stop!"

"Listen to me! If this is like last time, then maybe you could catch the man. It would be finished then, wouldn't it?" She gripped his arm with taloned fingers. "Wouldn't it?"

"Nuts! You're not clairvoyant!"

"Whatever else I am, I'm your wife, Gordon. For once in your life, just don't tell me to shut up and leave it at that! Help me, will you? Help me figure out what it means. There was water nearby; I heard running water like a river or stream, and it was across a path from the wolf. And coming up the path was . . ."

". . . An Indian?"

Dempsey nodded unhappily. "That's what Verna said, Lieutenant. Complete with hatchet, bow and arrows, and a loincloth."

"An Indian?" Kristovich's voice was rising sharply.

"If Verna hadn't been so hysterical, I'd never mention it, but she has a point. It panned out before."

"There aren't any Indians in Tigard, not worth stealing anyway." He was sitting in the same chair as the previous morning, though no longer playing solitaire. "I hate admitting it . . ."

"What?"

"There's Redman Electronics." Kristovich turned and pointed to a sectional map. "Redman Electronics, seven miles north of here on Valley Gorge Road, which has nothing else along it except rocks and trees."

"And it's beside the Miami River. It fits!"

"Good ol' Redman, largest single payroll this side of Dayton. First and fifteenth, in cash. And today's the thirteenth."

Dempsey sat stunned, then shook his head. "No, no way. No one could knock over an armored car, Lieutenant."

"We don't know there'd be only one. Your wife conjured up the wolf, but that doesn't mean he couldn't bring his pack along, and if he *did* succeed . . ." Kristovich moved his finger along the map. "Look here. It'd be duck soup for him to zip across to Interstate Highway 75 and up to South Dayton Airport, and with a little luck he'd be on a flight before the alarm was raised. I always figured Redman was a tempting chicken to pluck."

"Do you think—" Dempsey swallowed thickly, his throat parched. "Impossible. Even if it were true, and we only have a fool dream to go by for that, we don't know where along Valley Gorge Road it would happen. We could add a patrol, I suppose, and escort the armored car to Redman."

"And scare him off so he's free to try again? No . . . a trap!"

"But we don't have the manpower to blanket the entire seven miles—even assuming we took Verna's dream seriously."

"Naturally it's an *if*, Dempsey. I'm only conjecturing." Kristovich looked affronted, yet there was a definite gleam to his eye now. "Still, we could take men off some of the other details and spot them along the road with walkie-talkies, and station a few more along the cutover to Interstate 75 just in case. That'd leave Tigard pretty bare, but it would only be for a very short while, and if we *did* manage to catch the guy—"

"A feather, all right. But on nothing but a dream! I'd hate—"

"We wouldn't have to call in the state or county boys," Kristovich interrupted. "Nobody'd be the wiser if it turned out to be nothing but imagination. A little insurance, that's all it'd be. What's the name of the armored car com-



pany that goes there, Dempsey?"

"Arrow, sir. Arrow Transport."

"Hold me . . . Hold me . . ."

Verna nuzzled against him, and her hair was in his eyes. For the first time in ages, Dempsey was beginning to want to do more than merely hold his wife. His was not a frantic, hungered desire, but it was strong and certain, and he became increasingly aware of the way it had once been between them and the textured warmth of her body now. He wondered if they'd drifted too far apart to find their way together again.

"The wolf was attacking," Verna moaned. "Sprang from the rocks at the Indian's throat, teeth pearly like ivory knives."

Dempsey lifted her face and kissed the tears on her cheeks. She clutched him desperately for a moment, then pulled away. "No, Gordon, not that, not now. Hold me, just hold me . . ."

He held her, feeling poignant defeat. "We'll get him," he whispered in the bedroom's darkness. "This time we'll get him . . ."

"All set," Kristovich was saying somewhat proudly. "Most everybody available is staked out either on foot or in cruisers. If that guy tries anything, we'll have him nailed solid."

It was eight-thirty a.m. on Friday, the fifteenth of May. For the next hour, the small town would have to fend for itself, there being only a token force left in Tigard to manage the morning traffic. The loudspeaker chattered and Kristovich paced with nervous anticipation; otherwise, the station was filled with a strange, tense hush which made it seem abnormally quiet.

Dempsey stood rigidly beside the PBX, wishing that Oxford hadn't called in sick with the flu the previous night and could be with them now. This was worse than a shoot-out. In all his years on the force he'd never drawn his revolver except at the practice range, but he thought miserably that this had to be worse, because at least the other way you knew what was what. This was irrational, alien, almost frightening, and he was now convinced that Verna did have a premonition. Like most men, there were intuitive superstitions buried under his facade of civilization, and they were leaking through now, well-ing unwantedly in his chest. He'd never been quite like this before.

"Garner has three men at this end, and O'Donnell has four near Redman's entrance," Kristovich said, as much to himself as to Dempsey. It was reiteration, repe-

tition of what was already known, just to break the silence. "And Waters is heading the team strung out along the road. Yes, I'd say it's all set—"

The phone rang.

The O.D. plugged in the line, and Kristovich took the receiver to answer personally. "Tigard Police Department, Lieu— What? What was that?"

Kristovich suddenly aged while Dempsey stared at him. He listened intently and seemed to shrivel, to wither and grow ancient, the skin of his face becoming a salty gray like scoured pumice stone. "No," he kept groaning, "no . . ." and when it was over and he'd hung up, his was the expression of a condemned man whose reprieve has been denied.

Words were slow in coming. "The Ohio Trust at the south edge of town. It's just been hit."

Dempsey stood with his jaw unhinged. Then, as if his subconscious suddenly understood the ironic connection, he heard himself say, "The Ohio is a mighty big river."

"A hundred thousand wide, probably more," Kristovich replied, still half in a fog. "The bank had extra cash on hand because it's Friday."

"One man pull it? *Our* man?"

"Who else? That was Sheckley,

the manager, on the phone and he said there were just a few of them there with the guards, in the bank early to handle a money transfer which had been delivered a little after eight o'clock. How the guy knew enough to time it so well is beyond me, but he did. Ten minutes after the armored car had left, he drove up in a standard, gray business sedan like thousands of others, only his had a sign on the door that read *Arrow Transport*."

"Well, we got that right, at least," Dempsey said sourly.

"They could see the car from the windows, and the guy was acting excited, so they thought maybe something was wrong with the shipment they'd just received. A guard let him in. The guard got a vague glimpse of the man's face through the venetian blinds but not enough for identification, and while he was opening the door, the man turned as if looking back at the car. When the door was unlocked, the man rushed in with a gun and a mask over his head."

"Don't tell me, let me guess. A wolf mask."

"The guard who let him in, you know his name? Mohawk, that's what; Leland Mohawk. Oh, it's too much to take."

"Nobody hurt?"

"Nobody put up a fight, thank

God. He locked them in the outer vault after cleaning it out, and it wasn't until the vice-president arrived that they were freed. Sheckley's steamed up something fierce, and I can't blame him. They weren't going to argue with a gun over money—that's insured—but he sure wants to know what happened to all the policemen that are supposed to be in the vicinity. He wants to know why it's like we weren't working today."

"We'll radio an APB immediately. It'll take a good fifteen minutes to round up all our men."

"How can we explain this, Dempsey? What can we say?"

"The truth," Dempsey said grimly. "That we've been had."

"A snap, lover, just as I promised. A piece of cake, once we lured enough of them north out of town, so we could skip south with hardly anybody left to stop us. And now we're home free, free with suitcases full of long green and some fancy sparklers to wear around your pretty neck. I think it was knocking over Alpine that

made it work, the clincher that got them falling over themselves the second time around."

"Don't talk so loud. We might be overheard."

"You worry too much, honey. The flight's half empty and we're way in the back by ourselves." He took her quivering hand and squeezed it with great tenderness. "I was in the position to time things, but you made it possible. You should be in Hollywood with that performance of yours, crying 'wolf!' until Gordy was staggering, not knowing which end was up. Your act was sure convincing."

"Of course it was, darling," Verna replied, fondly gazing at Detective Paul Oxford seated next to her. "I spent most of my marriage crying for help to him in one form or another." Then, feeling her composure slipping, she turned and stared out the plane window, down at Cincinnati's Lunken Municipal Airport rapidly receding below.

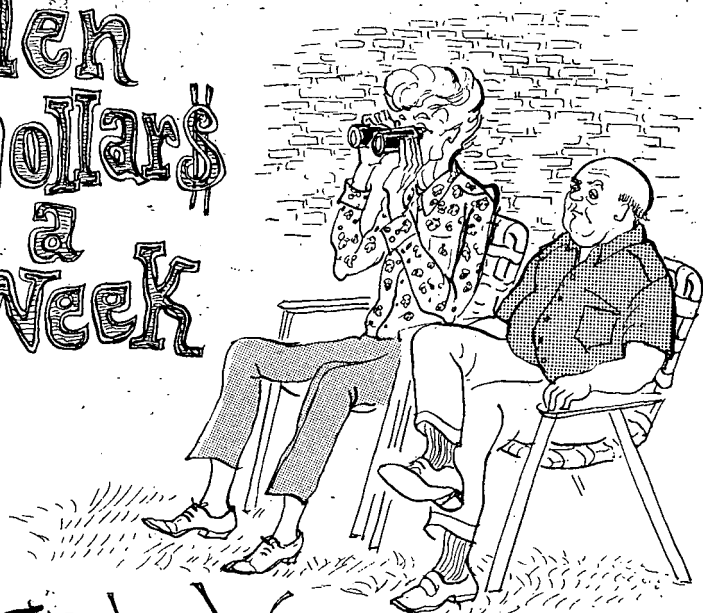
"But it's too bad Gordon didn't listen when it wasn't an act," she said softly.



There are occasions when a one-track mind may manifest a "madness" of splendid perspicuity.



# Ten Dollars a Week



by Stephen Wasylyuk

**M**orley remarked, "There is much to be said for a life of crime."

Bakov grunted. Sooner or later Morley would explain what he meant, and Bakov could afford to wait.

They occupied a pair of the folding beach chairs that were lined up against the wall of the red-brick building, like those on an ocean liner. The landscaped grounds, a smooth green sea, stretched before them to the

wrought iron fence and the street beyond that was the edge of the world fancifully called the Golden Age Retirement Center.

The Center was a pleasant and friendly place and most of the residents had little reason ever to leave its confines even if they were capable of doing so, their mobility hampered by the infirmities of old age, the lack of spending money, or both.

It was morning, the grass still wet with dew, and the heat hadn't yet penetrated the canopy of trees that surrounded the broad patio. The two men were alone, the others still at breakfast in the dining room.

Morley raised the powerful field glasses from his lap and studied the facade of the balconied apartment house that rose like a wall across the street. He was thin, his shoulders bony against the flowered sport shirt, his face creased and lined below the full thatch of unruly white hair that defied both comb and brush. His eyes were Wedgwood blue and surprisingly young for a man who had celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday only a few days before. Age hadn't slowed or dulled him as much as the economic system that no longer allowed him to earn a living.

"The woman on the fifth floor,"

he said, "is there again on the balcony. Every morning at the same time in the sun in her bikini."

"Bikinis I can see at the beach," Bakov said.

Morley handed him the glasses. "Not like this."

Bakov raised the glasses and studied the apartment house. "I do not think I like her all browned. A woman with a body like that should be nice and soft and white, maybe pink, but not burned by the sun." He let the glasses fall to his lap and leaned back in his chair. Small and heavy, his face sagged in basset-hound folds below a shining scalp that glistened slightly with perspiration. Heat bothered Bakov, even this early in the shade, but he preferred the company of Morley to the sterility of his room. He brushed his fringe of iron-gray hair carefully as if it were something precious. As old as Morley, one of Bakov's pet annoyances with old age was that it had deprived him of his once magnificent head of curly black hair. He felt that he could, at least, have been allowed to retain that, even if his once square hard body had sagged to resemble the lower half of an hourglass.

"So," he said, "what to do?"

"Crime," said Morley. "I should have led a life of crime. I would

not be here now. What do I have? A few dollars of pension, a few dollars of Social Security that all goes to this place. I do not even have enough pocket money to take a bus trip into town and if I did, what would I do when I got there with no money?"

"I have money," Bakov said. "My son sent my five-dollar allowance."

"It's not good," Morley complained. "We have both worked hard all our lives and what do we have? Nothing. We were honest citizens who obeyed the law and it got us nowhere. What little money we managed to put away is gone because of inflation. I will tell you something, Bakov. The director called me into his office yesterday. He wants me to pay him ten dollars more a week or I will have to leave. Where will I get it? Where can I go if I don't stay here?"

"He is raising the price ten dollars a week? He has said nothing to me."

"He will."

Bakov sighed. "Then we will have to leave together. I do not have ten dollars more a week either."

"You have a son to help. I have no one."

"No. He has a family of his own. He cannot afford the ten

dollars any more than I can."

"Give me the glasses," Morley requested.

He studied the apartment house again. "Every morning," he said. "As soon as her husband leaves, the young man arrives and the shades go down. Think of that. Every morning. You would think that they would get tired and miss a day once in a while."

"You were young once," Bakov said. "You know how it is."

"I was never that bad. Or good." He put the glasses down and studied the apartment house wall. "Suppose I went to her and told her that I would tell her husband unless she gave me ten dollars a week. It is a small amount. Do you think she would agree?"

"Blackmail?" Bakov's voice held a tinge of horror.

"Why not? Think of all the people in this country who steal. You read about them every day. Big financiers who manipulate money. Businessmen who don't pay their fair share of taxes. Politicians who take bribes. Even if they are caught, nothing happens to them. Dope pushers. Confidence men. Bank robbers. I tell you, Bakov, they have the right idea. By the time they are old, they have stolen enough money so that they do not concern themselves with ten dollars a week. I

have been thinking and thinking. There was a story in the paper last evening. A man walked into a bank and handed the teller a note saying he had a gun and he would shoot her if she didn't give him all her money. She did. He ran out and disappeared into the crowd with five thousand dollars. So easy. Do you think he'll ever be caught in a city this size? Never. I tell you that crime pays. I should have thought of that long ago."

"So you want to rob a bank?"

"Why not? All it would take is a little nerve, and that I have."

"You have no gun and together we do not have enough money to buy one. And if you had it what would you do with it? With your arthritis, you could not hold it properly and you also know nothing about guns."

Morley pursed his lips. "I have been thinking about that. I would not need a gun. I could make up a small package and tell the girl I had a bomb inside. I think she would give me the money."

"You sound serious."

Morley raised the glasses and studied the apartment house for a long time. "I am serious," he said. "Think for yourself. Here we sit, two old men who need only ten dollars a week or we will be thrown out into the street. We will have to find a small apart-

ment somewhere in a poor neighborhood where we will be afraid to go out because we will be robbed and we will slowly starve to death because food prices keep going up and up. For just ten dollars a week more we can stay here where it is pleasant and they take care of us as well as they can. It is not the finest place in the world but would you want to leave it, Bakov?"

"I think not," Bakov said.

"They are a little annoying sometimes with their chess tournaments and checker games and card parties but that is because I have never liked those things." He glanced around. The other beach chairs were beginning to fill up as the residents of the home began to circulate. "We are with our own kind here. I wonder how many of the others can afford ten dollars a week more."

"I do not know and it may sound hard, but I do not care. I am thinking only of myself. All night I lay awake thinking only of myself and I have reached a conclusion." He handed the glasses to Bakov. "Look at the sign a few doors from the apartment house and tell me what you see."

Bakov took the glasses and held them to his eyes. "What is so interesting about the car-wash place?"



"The other direction," Morley said impatiently.

Bakov swung the glasses, held them steady and put them down slowly. "You mean the bank?"

"I mean the bank. It would not even cost us carfare to get there."

"Us?"

"I would need your help."

"But I know nothing about banks."

"It is not necessary to know anything about banks to rob one. Do you think the people who do things like that know anything more than we do? They just go and rob."

"Just go and rob. You make it sound easy. There are bank guards and policemen and they have guns and they can shoot."

"It is easy," insisted Morley. "That's why so many do it. I planned it all last night. How we could do it and how it will work."

"And if we get caught?"

"We will not get caught." Morley shrugged. "And if we do, what can they do to us? How much longer do we have? A few years in prison won't matter. At least then we will not have to worry about ten dollars more a week." He took the glasses from Bakov and studied the bank, smiling a little. "But we won't get caught. I have considered it all very carefully. I have thought of finance com-

panies, retail stores, bars, even the car-wash place. None are as good as the bank."

"If you wish to rob someone, I suggest Greenbrier, the butcher in my old neighborhood. He has robbed everyone for years, the crook."

"You are not paying attention. How much money can a butcher have?"

"These days? All the money in the world."

"Forget Greenbrier. The bank is best. It is a small one, with one entrance, and at noon the sidewalks outside are crowded. The guard or the police will not shoot into a crowd. It will be easy to get away."

"On my legs with the varicose veins and the elastic stockings, you expect me to run?"

"You are not to run," Morley said impatiently. "You are to walk slowly so that you will not attract attention. If there is any running, I will do it."

Bakov sniffed. "You will run yourself into a heart attack."

A white-haired woman, supporting herself with a cane, tottered to the chair alongside them and collapsed into it gratefully as if achieving another small victory over time. She smiled at them.

Morley leaned toward Bakov. "Let's go to my room. I do not

want Miss America here to listen."

Morley's room was a warm cubbyhole on the second floor. Morley sat on the bed. Bakov took the one chair.

"I am not sure this is right," Bakov protested.

"The bank will not miss the money," Morley said. "They have insurance for things like that. Besides, we will not be taking a million dollars. A few thousand will do, only enough to see us through the next few years. You and I will not be around much longer, Bakov. Every day someone else goes, sometimes two or three."

"I feel fine," Bakov said. "I could go for another twenty years. So could you."

Morley gestured impatiently. "That is wishful thinking. We are concerned only with now, the present. Only with ten dollars a week for a little bit of time longer."

"I did not think I would turn criminal in my old age."

"You did not think that ten dollars a week would be such a big thing in your old age. When you were younger, you kept your money in the bank?"

"When I had it, which wasn't too often."

"The bank used your money to make a profit. They paid you a

little interest. All you are doing now is collecting more interest. Didn't you always feel you were entitled to a greater return on your money?"

"I suppose so." Bakov rubbed his face thoughtfully. "Just how do you intend to do this thing?"

Morley reached into a drawer and brought forth a rectangular package wrapped in brown paper. "This is my bomb," he said triumphantly.

"It looks like a shoe box covered with paper."

Morley's face fell. "That's what it is. But the girl in the bank will not know what is inside."

"What is inside?"

"Nothing," Morley admitted. "I do not think I need anything." He reached into his shirt pocket and handed Bakov a slip of paper. "Here is my note."

Bakov squinted his eyes and held the paper at arms' length. "I have a bomb in the box. Place all your money in the paper bag. Give no alarm until I have gone or I will blow the whole place up so that everyone will die, you included." He studied the note. "It is a little wordy, perhaps? You don't have to tell her she will die if you blow up the place. She knows that. I would leave that part out."

"Just what I need," Morley said

testily. "A literary critic. She will get the message. That is all that matters."

"Okay, you give her the note. Where is the paper bag?"

"Right here." Morley handed him a grease-stained paper sack. "I got this in the kitchen this morning."

Bakov's nose wrinkled. "You had to get one they used for fish?"

Morley gestured impatiently. "It is good enough. She puts the money in it and I walk out."

"Then what?"

"You will be waiting outside the door. I will slip you the paper sack so that even if I am caught, there will be no evidence."

"The guard will shoot you."

"Not as long as the teller thinks I have a bomb."

"He will chase you outside."

"He will do nothing in the crowd. He can't take the chance."

"It is a crazy scheme."

"That's why it will work. Do you think that other people have better ones? I have always studied these things in the newspaper. They are no different."

"They will collar me when you pass me the money."

"No one will notice. You will just cross the street and come back here. When I get away, I will join you."

"You will join me in jail."

"No," Morley said. "They do not expect old men to rob banks. They think old people are good only for shoplifting. Only the girl will get a good look at me and she will be frightened. We will be just two old men from the retirement home out for a noonday walk."

Bakov sat quietly.

"Ten dollars a week more," Morley said. "That's all we need. The bank will not raise too much fuss over a few thousand dollars."

"It is a madness," Bakov said. "I can't believe you intend to go through with it."

"Of course it is a madness. All brilliant ideas are a madness. And I will go through with it. I am going to do as others do. I am going to take what I need. If you will not help me, I will do it alone."

Bakov ran a hand over his face, tugged at his collar and fingered his precious hair, his face settling into even sadder folds. "All right," he agreed finally. "If you insist on going to jail, I will go with you so you shouldn't be lonely. Is today a good day?"

"Today is as good as any other. Let us go down and sit in the chairs until it is time."

It was after twelve when they walked across the grounds and

through the gate, Morley ahead, Bakov following.

Morley clutched his empty shoe box to his chest, his paper bag folded in his hand. They made their way slowly across the street, meticulously observing the traffic lights; Morley erect and shoulders back, Bakov slouching and shuffling slightly.

At the bank's revolving door, Morley turned and gave Bakov a significant look.

It was quiet inside, people standing in line before the tellers' windows with preoccupied expressions on their faces. Morley looked over the tellers. All three were young, their smiles automatic as they greeted each customer. There was little to choose among the three. Morley joined the line nearest the door.

His palms were wet and he could feel a tightness in his stomach, like a massive dose of indigestion, reminding him he had forgotten to take his stomach pill that morning.

It had all sounded so simple when he explained it to Bakov. It didn't seem so simple now.

*Ten dollars more a week*, he thought.

He was fourth in line. The man ahead of him was tall, blocking his view of the teller. Morley felt a touch of irritation. He moved

slightly to one side. The teller was young, a bright and lively girl with short blonde hair and a healthy glow to her skin. The line moved forward.

Morley glanced outside. Bakov was standing near the door, peering into the bank, his bald head glistening. *Fool*, thought Morley. *He will attract attention that way.*

The man ahead of him was at the teller's window now. Morley craned his neck slightly to study the girl again.

Her face no longer had that healthy glow. It was white. She was stuffing money into a bag, not counting it out.

*Not counting it out.*

A little warning flashed through Morley's mind. The girl had counted carefully for the other two customers, taking time to do it twice. Why should she now be stuffing the money into a bag?

Her eyes were fixed on her moving hands as if she were afraid to look up and Morley thought he noticed a slight tremor.

The man reached across the counter and took the bag from the girl. She glanced up, her eyes met Morley's and he saw fright and an appeal there.

The man turned away. Morley followed, not knowing why, sure that the man had forced the girl to give him the money but not

knowing how he had managed to do it.

*That was my money, Morley thought angrily. He had no right to take my money.*

The man moved quickly toward the door. Bakov stepped inside the bank, his eyes fixed on Morley. He lifted a hand and stepped forward, right into the man's path. The man cursed and pushed and Bakov staggered backward and fell heavily, his eyes wide, his mouth open.

Morley recalled a trick from his long-ago youth when he used to walk up behind another and swing a leg out, hooking his victim's ankle and forcing it in back of the other calf so that it caught there and the victim would tumble and fall. It required luck and timing and Morley had been an expert at it. He did it now and the man pitched forward, his head striking the massive brass frame of the revolving door with a dull cracking sound, the bag in his hand coming loose and scattering wads of banded bills all over the bank floor. A small revolver clattered as it slid across the marble.

Behind Morley, the teller finally screamed and a uniformed guard came running up.

Bakov painfully pushed himself to his feet and looked down at the man. He looked at Morley and shrugged. "So what else is new?"

he asked shakily, his face pale.

It was a nice morning, the grass still wet with dew. Morley and Bakov sat in their usual chairs.

Morley peered through the field glasses. "She is there again," he said. "Still in the bikini."

"I am not interested," Bakov replied. "I ache too much. It is not good for an old man to be pushed like that."

"The man is paying for it. He is now in jail. Can you do anything more to him?"

"You might be in jail instead of him."

"I think not. You notice that if I hadn't tripped him, he would have got away. There was no one to trip me. I still think it was a good idea. They never even asked me why I was there. I tell you, Bakov, that at seventy-five, you acquire an automatic innocence. No one looks at you, no one pays any attention to you unless you drop dead in front of them. Why did you come into the bank? You spoiled the plan."

"I was going to stop you. Men like us are too old to start a life of crime. We would not be good at it."

"I disagree. We have many people here with many talents. I could form a gang . . ."

"That would be fine," Bakov

said dryly. "We could use motorized wheelchairs for our getaways. Don't talk foolish."

"So you would suffer instead?"

Bakov shrugged. "After seventy-five years, a little more suffering couldn't hurt. We would have managed."

Morley sighed. "At least we will not have to worry for a while. The bank manager told me he will pay a ten percent reward and it should be about a thousand dollars. And then that newspaper will send me a check for my exclusive story of how I captured the robber. It is not often that a senior citizen becomes involved. They do not know I was angry because he took our money and pushed you. So we can stay here for another year or so."

"We can stay even longer," Bakov said. He reached into his pocket and handed Morley a banded stack of money. The band read \$1000. "I picked it up from the floor when I fell. Do you think they will miss it?"

"Of course, but there were many people there. Anyone could have taken it."

"I think we should return it."

Morley thought for a moment. "There is no hurry. We will hold the money. We do not need it now. Perhaps we will never need it. When our time comes, we can leave instructions to return it to the bank. We can consider it an interest-free loan."

"Ah, well," said Bakov, settling in his chair. "We can now sit and watch in peace. Give me the glasses."

"There is one thing we must do," Morley said.

"What is that?"

"Get another pair. Your eyes are not the same as mine and I must always change the focus."

Bakov bristled. "It is annoying to me, too. We will buy them this afternoon."

"After the noonday crowds," Morley said. "There will be many bright young girls out walking."

"Yes, bless the bright young girls. It is a good thing you did not rob the bank."

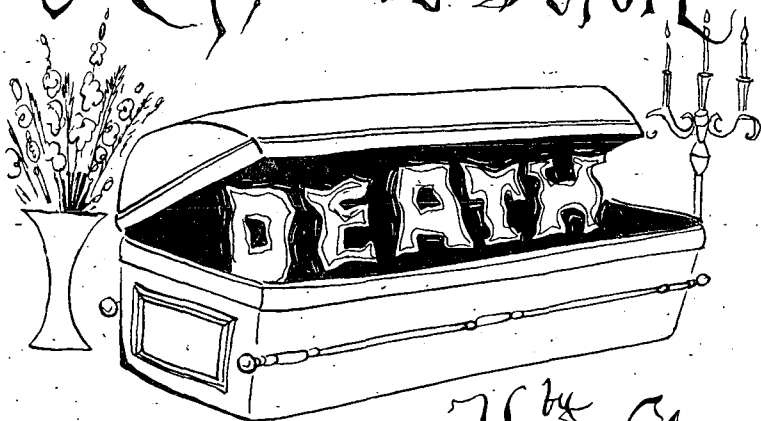
"Why not?"

"You would have been caught and what is there to look at in jail?"



One should think of possible side effects before prescribing simple pleasures.

# Happiness Before



by  
Henry Slesar

The psychiatrist's voice, in some ventriloquial effect, seemed to be emanating from his framed diploma over his head. The engraved scrawl lent majesty to his otherwise mundane name: Harold Miller. Studying the splendid loops and swirls, Werther Oaks wondered if Dr. Miller had supplied his own signature to be grandly redesigned by the fine Italian hand—or was it Viennese? He squinted and made out the

place of matriculation: New Jersey. Where have all the Viennese psychiatrists gone? Dr. Miller seemed to realize he wasn't listening. Throat-clearing followed.

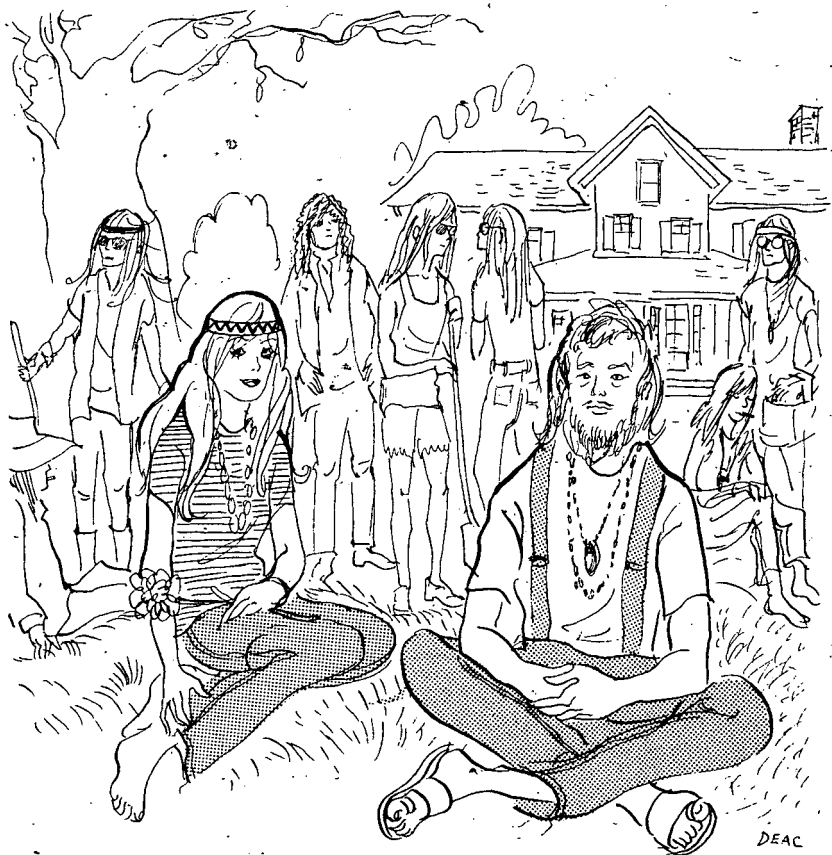
"I'm sorry," Werther said. "I'm having trouble concentrating. What you're saying is—well, I can't really believe what you're saying."



"I know," Dr. Miller said, the voice now emanating gravely from its natural source. "It's not an easy thing to hear about one's own wife. But I honestly believe

mean to include myself, of course. I haven't been a bad sort of husband, but I don't ask you to accept that."

"And I didn't ask you here to



it's so, Mr. Oaks. That overdose was no accident. As Freud once said, *there are* no accidents."

"It's just hard to comprehend. I mean, about Sylvia. With all she has." A wry addition: "I don't

point an accusing finger either."

Werther looked at Miller's fingers. They were short and stubby. Werther's hands were exquisite. He had been a hand model when he met Sylvia at the Grosse

Pointe Country Club. When she learned of his odd profession, she had smiled insultingly. Later, on the terrace, she had wondered aloud what it would be like to be touched by a pair of famous hands.

"Dr. Miller," Werther said, "my wife swore to me that she took those extra pills purely by mistake. Are you telling me that it was deliberate?"

"I'd say it was the expression of an unconscious wish. Because, you see, the fact that your wife has 'everything' doesn't mean that she has—*everything*. Do you see what I mean?"

Werther considered slapping Sylvia that night, with one of his famous hands. Instead, he framed her face between his palms and planted a gentle kiss on her lips. The slap would have surprised her less.

Two months later, despite the anguish of her friends, who bluntly called Werther a fortune hunter and worse, they were married. On their honeymoon, she had seized him by the wrists and exulted, "Now they're mine!" He made a joke about giving his hands in marriage, and Sylvia had laughed. It was the last time he'd heard her laugh.

"Well, she's not exactly a cheerful woman," Werther told the

psychiatrist. "I knew that from the moment I met her. She has fits of depression, but I never thought of them as being terribly serious."

"She tells me that she would lock herself in her room for three and four days at a time."

"Well, yes, she does that now and then. It's her way of getting away from all the pressures."

"What pressures?"

"Having money doesn't take away obligations," Werther said, actually parroting Sylvia's financial manager, Vossberg.

"Ah," Miller said, looking almost Viennese now. "But having money doesn't always guarantee emotional health."

"Won't buy happiness?"

"To a psychiatrist," Miller said in deep tones, "that cliché is fraught with meaning. And there, I think, is the key to your wife's problem. The silver spoon she was born with is still in her mouth, and now it's choking her. Perhaps to death."

Werther's eyes blinked several times.

"Money has made her miserable," Dr. Miller continued. "Money has made her lead a life devoid of personal satisfaction. She is unable to enjoy simple pleasures, and therefore she experiences *no* pleasure at all."

"Found *that* out," Werther murmured. "But do you really think she's unhappy enough to kill herself?"

"Unless something is done," Dr. Miller said, "there may well be another 'accident' like the one two nights ago. And this next one may prove fatal."

When Dr. Miller walked him out of the office, Werther offered one of his famous hands, and it was trembling badly. Miller suggested that he get some rest, too.

Werther left the medical building and was surprised to find that it was still daylight. His XKL was at the curb, overparked by half an hour, but he still took the time to walk around the block and think about what he had just learned.

Sylvia might kill herself.

Sylvia was so miserable that she was going to die of her misery.

The full import filled him up like a wineglass, and the effect was like champagne. If nobody had been watching, he would have leaped in the air with joy.

Velvet knew something was different about him, but waited with catlike contentment to let Werther make his own explanation. She curled up on the floor beside him as he sat rigidly on the sofa, smoking a small brown cigar and inhaling it like the cigarettes he

had eschewed. She tugged one sock down to his shoes and rubbed his ankle.

"Thursday night," Werther said slowly, "Sylvia swallowed four sleeping pills, maybe five. Said she made a mistake. Thought they were aspirin."

"Who takes five aspirin?" Velvet asked logically.

"Ah," Werther said, realizing that he now sounded like Dr. Miller.

"Wushy-mushy-tushy, will you please tell me what's the big deal?"

He winced at the name, but it was something worth living with. Velvet was the highest-paid girl in the Tilford Model Agency. She never earned less than a hundred dollars an hour, which made her personal income higher than Werther's own allowance (dispensed by Vossberg). Under the circumstances, he considered himself lucky to be Velvet's special friend. They had met in the agency several months before his Grosse Pointe encounter with Sylvia. (He had gone to Detroit to perform in a commercial for one of the auto companies. "Watch these hands on this wheel and learn what's really new in auto engineering!") When he had married Sylvia, Velvet had screamed at him for almost a full hour, ending up with a

case of laryngitis that kept her from performing in a Silk-Crème commercial the next day. Every month after that, she sent him a bill for the residuals she wasn't receiving. He had finally paid his debt with a diamond bracelet charged at Tiffany. To this day, Vossberg thought he had presented the gift to Sylvia.

"My wife is going to kill herself," Werther said. "That's the big deal."

"Are you joking? Are you saying that for a *joke*?"

"Vel," Werther said with pained lips, "do you think I'd joke about such a thing? Do you realize what it *means*? We don't have to go through with the car business, with the whole chancy *brake* business, with that whole sticky, rotten, scary *murder* business!"

"Oh, Wushy," Velvet wailed, covering her ears, "don't say that word here. How can you *say* that word in my house? Who knows who could *hear* you? You know we promised never to say 'mm-mm.'"

"We've been talking about mm-mm for six months," Werther said. "And now poor Sylvia may mm-mm herself."

"Poor Sylvia?"

"Yes," Werther said. "She's worse off than I thought—all mixed up inside, hates her own

money. That's a laugh, isn't it? Her hating the money I love so much."

"You got to be crazy to hate money," Velvet said. "Maybe that's why she's going to that shrink, because she's crazy."

"She's unhappy," Werther said, sighing out a trail of smoke. "She's always been unhappy. Because the money never meant anything to her—like it does to me, for instance."

"And me," Velvet said. "Look, Werther, look," jabbing an inch-long nail at the corner of her eyes. "Look at the crow's-feet starting. In another year, down come the rates."

"There's no telling when she'll do it," Werther said. "No telling when she'll try again. Maybe next week, maybe next year, maybe two years from now."

"Hey!"

"The psychiatrist couldn't predict, he just doesn't know. It all depends."

"On how *unhappy* she is? Then make her unhappy, Wushy!"

"Yeah, fine, great." He frowned. "And the money, the will, the inheritance? I'm hanging by a thread right now, and don't think Vossberg isn't standing by with a big pair of scissors. No," he said sadly, "I don't *want* to make that poor woman unhappy. I like her,

Velvet, I really feel sorry for that poor miserable person."

"That's what I love about you," Velvet sighed, a soft cheek against his ankle. "You're a person with heart."

"So what I have to do," Werther said, "is *give* her an overdose of sleeping pills. Dr. Miller will swear she was ready for it, and nobody's the wiser."

Sylvia's eyes were closed when he entered the bedroom. His heartbeat accelerated as he went up to the satin-sheeted oval bed and put his hand close to her mouth. Her breath fogged his polished fingernails.

"Sylvia?" he whispered.

"I'm not asleep," she said. Her eyes came open and looked at him directly; her pupils were like black wells filled with unshed tears. "I was waiting for you. I wanted to hear what Dr. Miller told you."

"Now who said I saw Dr. Miller?"

"The scratch-pad near the phone. You wrote down his address. Obviously he called you. What did he say about me?"

"About you, nothing." Werther smiled. "He just wanted to know what kind of rotten husband doesn't watch what his wife takes out of the medicine cabinet."

"How dare he call you a rotten husband?"

"But I am," he said cheerfully. "Look at the hours I keep. If I had gotten home before ten that night, this wouldn't have happened."

"I know you work hard," Sylvia said. Of course, she knew nothing of the kind; she merely assumed that all men worked hard. Her father had made seventy million dollars by never leaving his office except to get his teeth cleaned. Werther, who now worked for the company her father had founded (American Bit & Drill) was actually the most indolent executive imaginable, which suited everyone just fine. An ignorant executive owes his colleagues an avoidance of diligence.

"Tell me the truth," Sylvia said. "What did Dr. Miller say about me? Did he tell you all my little traumas?"

"No," Werther answered. "He just said that you were a very wonderful person who hasn't been given a real chance to be herself."

For a moment, the wells of her eyes almost brought in a gusher.

"There must be something wrong with me, Werther. Why can't I *feel* happy? I know I *should* be happy, but all I feel is this emptiness inside. Werther, tell me what to do!"

"Right now, darling," her husband said, "just close your eyes and try to sleep. Remember, Vossberg will be here in the morning. You'll need your strength to put up with him."

"You're my strength, Werther," she said, and clutched at his beautiful hands.

The gesture choked him up. When her eyes closed again, still tearless, he felt moisture under his own lids. "Poor Sylvia," he whispered.

The next day, he flung all six darts at the target in his office, and then picked up the phone with determination.

"Velvet," he said, "I've got to talk to you."

"I'm listening."

"Not on the phone. Are you going to the shampoo job?"

"All through. Now I've come home to wash my hair."

"I'll meet you there."

He forced her to sit on the couch while he paced the floor.

"I can't do it," he said.

"What?"

"Don't get excited."

She wasn't; just baffled.

"I don't mean I've changed my mind. I mean I just can't do it *now*, right now. It wouldn't be right."

"What wouldn't be? Mm-mm-ing her?"

"Yes. Mm-mm-ing her. Not now, Velvet, I just can't."

"But you said now would be the best time, Wushy, on account of her psychiatrist *knows* she's suicidal, and he'll blame it all on *her*, not on you."

"I know what I said."

"Then why wait? I mean, if she's miserable *now*, that's the time when she'd do it."

"But that's also the reason I *can't* do it, Vel. Because she's miserable. Because that poor lady hasn't known a day of really being happy in her whole life. Choking on that silver spoon."

"What spoon?"

"Never mind," Werther said.

"The point is, she's had nothing to be happy about. Not even me."

"But she loves you."

"I'm her strength," Werther said, now sounding like Sylvia.

"That's all I am to her. But I haven't made her happy, and that isn't right. It isn't fair, Velvet, to take all her money without giving her *something* in return."

"Gee, you're a funny sort of person," Velvet said, not without admiration.

"So what I was thinking," Werther said, "was that I might try to make her happy—really happy—before she dies."

"Huh?"

"I don't know if I can succeed."

I don't know if this Dr. Miller really knows what he's talking about, whether his theory is right—that money's spoiled her so bad she can't enjoy the simple things."

"What simple things?"

"You know. Like the things in nature. The sky when the clouds are getting together to discuss the rain . . ."

"Oh, Werther, that's beautiful!"

He had read it on a calendar. "The sky when it's really worth looking at, and the way the ocean rolls, and the way the grass feels when you lie down on it after walking a little too far . . ."

"Yes," Velvet nodded, "yes, I know what you mean, Wushy. I enjoy those things, too, but it's even nicer if you have money."

"No," he said. "It's doing these things *without* money, without *paying* for them, without buying a *ticket* to everything and feeling you've got to enjoy them just because there was a price tag attached . . . Don't you see what I mean?"

"Wushy, will you please tell me what you're going to do?"

"I'm going to take Sylvia on a trip—a special trip—no first-class arrangements, no fancy hotels, nothing that money can buy. I'm going to see if she can be happy the way poor people can be

happy, not giving a damn about tomorrow, just happy to be alive, and with each other, man and woman, sky, ocean, grass. I know it sounds crazy, maybe *she'll* think I'm crazy, but I'm going to suggest it. She's got it coming to her, Vel. A little happiness before the end. You know?"

"Yes," Velvet said, looking at him in awe. "And you know what else I know, Wushy? You're going to make me a wonderful husband."

Sylvia was incredulous at first. "A trip without money? What on earth do you mean?"

He laughed. "I knew you'd have that reaction, darling. But I mean every word of it. Oh, not that we'd be completely flat broke. We'd take maybe four, five hundred dollars with us. But we won't go to any of *those* places, we won't stop at hotels, we won't hire cars or do anything else that a couple of crazy kids couldn't afford to do."

"Werther, I can't believe you're serious. We've always spent a fortune on our trips—"

"And how much fun did you ever have? Face it, Sylvia, how much have you enjoyed them?"

"But where would we go?"

"Where do Gypsies go? Anywhere, everywhere! No destina-



tion. Off on the open road."

"In a wagon?"

"How about a bicycle? How about our feet? Or our thumbs, for that matter?"

"You mean hitchhike?"

"Why not? You've got a very pretty thumb; did I ever tell you that?"

"Coming from you, Hands, that's a compliment."

He laughed like a boy. "We'll be hoboes, darling. We'll be vagrants, tramps, wanderers, nomads! If we're lucky, maybe we'll even get ourselves arrested—"

"No thank you!"

"We'll eat hamburgers in roadside stands and pick blueberries in the woods. We'll stay at the cheapest motels and sign the register Mr. and Mrs. Smith so that no one will suspect that we're legitimately married . . ."

She was actually smiling. "Werther, I think you're just a little mad."

"But I want us to be completely mad, Sylvia. I want us both to know what it feels like to breathe unconditioned air, and swim in unchlorinated water, and drink cheap wine and eat Mrs. Nobody's food and maybe beat the check if we're running out of cash . . ."

"I really think you mean this."

"I want us to leave tomorrow—

tonight—this minute—and not tell anyone where we're going, not even Vossberg; just grab whatever cash that's lying around and take off for parts unknown. No letter of credit, no word to the bank, no suitcases—"

Sylvia gasped.

"Well, all right, one small suitcase, *small*, just very necessary things."

"Werther, it's the silliest idea I ever heard in my whole life. I don't think we'd last more than a week doing such a thing."

"If we feel like it, we could stow away on a ship going to Europe. We could probably bum our way across the entire continent."

"I've never seen you like this, Werther!"

"And I've never seen you really enjoy life, Sylvia," he said, taking her into his arms. "And that's why I want you to say yes."

"And you're sure we shouldn't tell Vossberg?"

Werther beamed with a sense of victory.

"We'll send him a postcard," he said jubilantly. "We'll send him a card from some tacky gift shop, and we'll write—'having a wonderful time! Glad you're not here!'"

For the second time since he knew her, Sylvia laughed.

Velvet received Werther's letter

two months later. She had almost abandoned hope of ever hearing from him again, and her subsequent depression had taken its toll. Three more crows had marched across her face in the interim, and like an augury, the agency received (and accepted in her name) an assignment to pose in a beer ad for ninety dollars an hour—ten percent downgrade.

She tore open the letter with such excitement that she lost half a dozen words on the second page.

The remains of the letter read as follows:

*Darling Vel,*

*Sorry I haven't written, but the circumstances made it impossible. Sylvia and I have just returned from Big Sur, where we were staying in a commune which was notable for the fact that it was impossible, literally impossible, to tell the boys from the girls, at least through visual acuity. This was because the male half of the commune (I'm assuming there was a male half) had all decided that beards were "out" this year, even though long hair was still "in." As for myself, however, you will be interested to know that I have a luxuriant brown beard which makes me look a bit like Walt Whitman, I think, only younger and handsomer, if you'll pardon*

*my vanity. Sylvia herself looks entirely different from the woman who left with me on our wild adventure two months ago. She hasn't worn one iota of makeup since the first week (she took half a dozen cosmetics with her when we started out, but she soon threw them away). Just the same, she never looked better. Her skin is brown as a walnut but as unwrinkled as a peach. She's lost at least ten pounds which I thought would make her into a scarecrow, but somehow it suits her very well. She's terribly pleased about her svelte new figure but oddly enough she doesn't think of it in terms of what clothes she'll drape it in. She has simply stopped caring about Halston and Yves St. Laurent and Madame Gres and about ever going back to fashionable restaurants or appearing at fashionable parties. In fact, most of the things that Sylvia thought were necessary to the so-called "good life" no longer hold the slightest interest for her. But the important thing I wanted you to know is that Sylvia is happy. I mean she's happy, Vel, she's never been happier or more contented in her entire life. From the day we left (with exactly four hundred and twelve dollars in our pockets, and the solemn resolution to make it last two months) she found a*

whole new personality hiding inside that body of hers, a prisoner who was dying to come out and see the world as it really was. I can't possibly tell you what these two months have been like. Can you imagine eating goat as a main course for dinner, or sleeping in a haystack for two nights in a row, or riding in a boxcar with three drunken tramps who played the harmonica all night long in terrible cacophony, or getting a job picking apples and eating so many of them that you never wanted to see an apple again, or making friends with a gang of rock-and-roll musicians who took us on their bus all the way to Charlotteville, North Carolina, a distance of sixty miles? Vel, I can't tell you everything, but then we've got lots of time for you to hear the whole story. All you need know for now is that I did what I thought was right, that I did what I knew I had to do, and now it's all over and finished, and Sylvia and I are coming back home. She's a changed person, Vel, and a much happier person, but I wanted you to know that I haven't changed, not about the things that are important to me. I'm sure you know what I mean. So don't expect me to be in touch with you for several days. You'll know why in just a little while. Meanwhile, all my

love, and don't forget to burn this letter.

Werther

P.S. I told you to burn this letter. What are you waiting for?

Velvet burned the letter.

It was a week to the day that she read the news about Sylvia Oaks' tragic death. Only one newspaper, the *News*, considered the story important enough to relate outside of its obituary columns, but in all the papers which reported it, she was described as an "heiress." The *Times* ran her picture, one obviously taken before her days of nut-brown skin and no makeup. Most of the obituary was devoted to her father, not her; it was a sad, gratuitous insult, Velvet thought. The cause of her death was listed as an overdose of sleeping pills. She was survived by her husband, Werther. The article in the *News* said she had been "depressed."

When Werther didn't show up the next day, or the day after, Velvet started getting anxiety attacks. She didn't want to phone him at home; there might still be mourners around who would raise eyebrows. However, when she still hadn't heard from him by the end of the week, she decided to risk a call. A maid answered, said that he was in conference, and Velvet

hung up, more anxious than ever.

That night, Werther called and explained. The conference was with Vossberg, the man Werther was always mentioning with huge bitterness. He had something to do with money. There were questions about the estate, about probating of the will, questions that Werther couldn't get answered. He sounded troubled. Velvet understood, of course. People who committed mm-mm would have to be troubled.

Finally, Werther called and said he was coming over. He sounded funny.

"You sounded funny," Velvet told him.

She looked at him and added, "You *look* funny."

"It's the beard," Werther said. "I shaved it off. My skin under it was white. The rest of my face is tan. That's why I look funny." He sat heavily on the couch, staring straight ahead.

"Wushy, you didn't learn to take *drugs* or something in that commune, did you?"

"No," Werther said, shaking his

head, without moving his eyes.

"Then what is it? Why do you look that way?"

"I made her happy," Werther said dreamily. "I did what I said I'd do, Vel. I made Sylvia happy before she died. Then I gave her those pills, and she went to sleep, and she was smiling. I swear she was smiling when they found her."

"Is that why you're like this?" Velvet asked.

"No," Werther said. He looked down at his exquisite hands. He noticed that there were wrinkles on the back, like the tracks of a bird. Then he looked at Velvet.

"I just came from the lawyer's office," he said. "I found out what Sylvia did when we came back from our trip. She changed her will, Velvet."

"She *what*?"

"She gave it all away. All her money. She gave it all to charity. She wanted to be poor, because that's what made her happy."

"Happy," Werther repeated, the word sounding like the beginning of a dirge.



*Some forms of skulduggery may prove hazardous to the health.*



# Memento Mori

There are murder weapons and there are murder weapons, but the thing used to bludgeon Philip Asher to death was the most grisly I'd seen in more than two decades on the police force.

It was a skull—a human skull.

Ed Crane and I stood staring down at what was left of it, lying splintered and gore-streaked to one side of the dead man. It had apparently cracked like an egg-shell on the first or second blow, but that first or second blow had been all that was needed to shatter Asher's skull as well. Judging from the concavity of the wound, he had been struck with no small amount of force.

I pulled my gaze away finally and let it move over the room, a large and darkly-masculine study. Well-used, leather-bound books



Bill  
Pronzini

covered two walls, and a third was adorned with what appeared to be primitive Mexican or Central American art and craftwork: pottery, statuary, wood carvings, weaponry. There were two teak-wood desks arranged so that they faced one another—one large and ostentatious, the other, small and functional—and several pieces of teak-and-leather furniture. It should have been an impressively comfortable room, but for me it

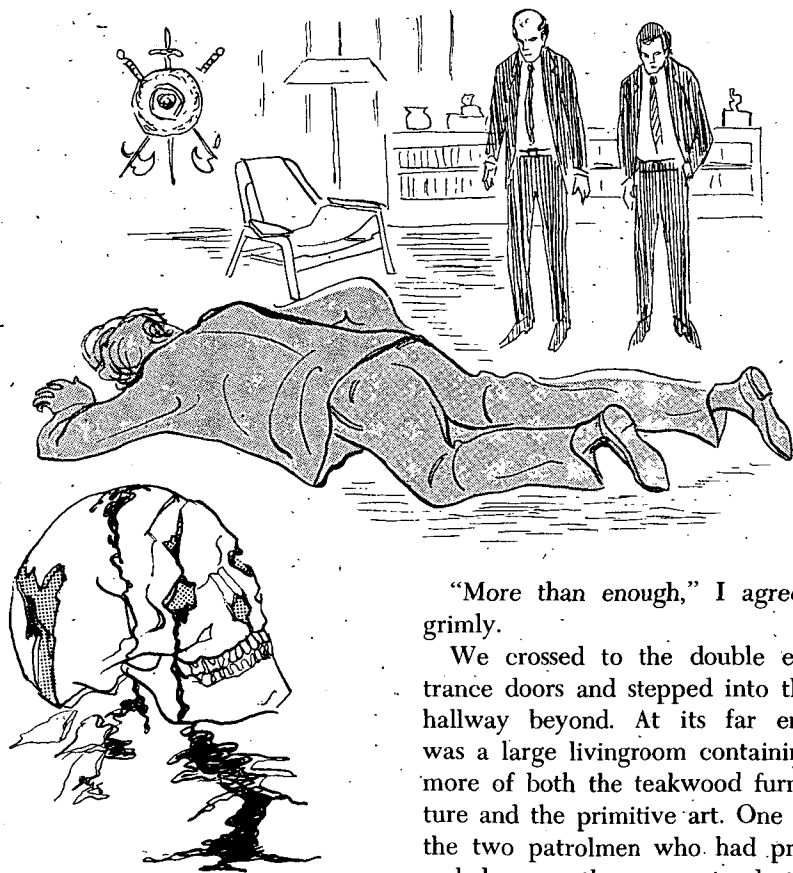
wasn't; there seemed to be a kind of cold, impersonal quality to the whole, despite the books and art. Or maybe I was just overreacting to the dead man's presence, and to the presence of the broken and bloody skull.

Crane said, "If I wasn't seeing

it for myself, I don't think I'd believe it."

"Yeah."

He made a soft blowing sound between pursed lips, and rubbed the bald spot on the crown of his head. "Well, I've had enough in here if you have."



"More than enough," I agreed grimly.

We crossed to the double entrance doors and stepped into the hallway beyond. At its far end was a large livingroom containing more of both the teakwood furniture and the primitive art. One of the two patrolmen who had preceded us on the scene stood stoically beside a long sofa; the other

officer was waiting outside for the arrival of the lab crew and the coroner. Sitting stiffly in the middle of the sofa was Douglas Falconer—hands flat on his knees, eyes blinking rapidly, myopically, behind thick-lensed glasses. He was about forty, with a thin, chinless face and sparse sand-colored hair, dressed in slacks and a navy-blue shirt. He looked timid and completely harmless; but when he'd called headquarters a half hour earlier, he had confessed immediately to having murdered Philip Asher—and the dried stains on his right shirt sleeve and on the back of his right hand confirmed his guilt clearly enough.

All we knew about Falconer and Asher was that the deceased owned this house, an expensive Spanish-style villa in one of the city's finer residential areas; that Falconer had been his male secretary; that no one else had been present at the time of the slaying; and that the crime had been committed, in Falconer's words, "during a moment of blind fury." We had no idea as to motive, and we hadn't been prepared at all for the nature of the murder weapon.

Falconer kept on blinking as Crane and I approached and stopped, one on either side of him, but his eyes did not seem to be seeing anything in the room. I

thought maybe he'd gone into delayed shock, but when I said his name, his head jerked up and the eyes focused on me. They, and the remainder of his face, were expressionless.

I said quietly, "You want to tell us about it, Falconer?" We'd already apprised him of his rights, and he had waived his privilege of presence of counsel during questioning.

"I murdered Asher. I already told you that." His voice was soft and resigned. "I had the brief thought at first of trying to cover up, of making it appear as if a burglar were responsible, but I knew that would be a futile undertaking. I'm not really a very adept liar, even though I've had a great deal of practice. Besides, I . . . I seem to have lost the capacity to care what happens to me from now on. I'm tired, Officer. You would not believe just how incredibly tired I am."

"Why did you kill him?" Crane asked.

Falconer began shaking his head in a slow, steady rhythm—not with refusal to answer but as if, just yet, he could not quite bring himself to put voice to the reason. We would get it out of him sooner or later, so there was no point in trying to force it.

I said, "Why the skull, Fal-

coner? Where did you get a thing like that in the first place?"

He closed his eyes, popped them open again. "Asher kept it on the shelf behind his desk. He was sitting at the desk when I . . . when I did it."

"He kept a human skull in full view in his study?" Crane's tone was one of incredulity. "What the hell for?"

"He claimed he enjoyed the reactions of visitors when they saw it, for one thing. He had a macabre sense of humor. For another, he . . . he referred to it as his *memento mori*."

"His what?"

"A reminder of death," Falconer said. "A reminder that we're all mortal and all must someday perish."

"That sounds pretty morbid to me."

"Philip Asher was always a fearless man, a callous man, a cold-blooded man. Death never bothered him in the slightest. It was, in one sense, his life; he devoted his life to the past dead."

Crane and I exchanged glances. "You'd better explain that," I said.

"He was an anthropologist—quite a renowned one, quite a wealthy one. He published several successful books on the Mayan and Aztec races, and was in great demand as a lecturer and as a

consultant to various university anthropological departments specializing in pre-Columbian studies."

"You were his full-time secretary, is that right?"

"Yes. I helped him with research, accompanied him on periodic expeditions to the Yucatan and other parts of Mexico, as well as to Central America, correlated his notes, typed his book manuscripts and business correspondence."

"How long did you work for him?"

"Eight years."

"Do you live here, or somewhere else?"

"Here. I have a room in the south wing."

"Does anyone else live in this house?"

"No. Asher's wife left him several years ago, and he never remarried. He had no immediate relatives."

Crane said, "Did you premeditate your employer's death?"

"I didn't plan to kill him today, if that's what you mean."

"You and Asher had an argument, then?"

"No, there wasn't any argument."

"Then what triggered this murderous rage of yours?" I asked.

"What happened this morning



that made a killer out of you?"

He started to shake his head again, sat rigidly for a moment instead, and then slumped backward bonelessly. His eyes seemed to be looking again at something not in the room. He said at length, "A revelation. A . . . revelation."

I traded another look with Crane. To Falconer I said, "Go ahead."

He sighed heavily. "I received a letter yesterday afternoon from another leading anthropologist whom I met through Asher—containing an offer to join him as personal secretary, at a substantial increase in salary. I considered the offer carefully, and this morning decided that I could not afford to turn it down. But when I told Asher of both the offer and my decision, he . . . he refused to accept my resignation. He said he couldn't be certain of my continued silence if I were no longer in his employ or in his house. He ordered me to remain, and said he would take steps against me if I didn't . . ."

Frowning, I said, "Wait a minute, now. Your continued silence about *what*, Falconer?"

"Something that happened six years ago."

"What something?"

He did not speak again for several seconds. Then he swallowed

thickly and said, "The death of his wife and her . . . lover, an itinerant musician, at Asher's summer lodge on Lake Pontrain."

We stared at him. Crane said, "You told us a couple of minutes ago that his wife had left him, not that she was dead."

"Did I? Yes, I suppose I did. I've told the same lie, in exactly the same way, so many times that it has become an automatic response. Mildred and her lover died at Lake Pontrain; that is the truth."

"All right—how did they die?"

"By asphyxiation. It happened on a Saturday in September, six years ago. Early that morning Asher decided on the spur of the moment to spend some time at the lodge; the book he was writing at the time was going badly and he thought a change of scenery might help. He drove up alone at eight; I had an errand to do, and followed in my own car about an hour later. When I reached the lodge, I found Asher inside with the bodies. They were in bed—Mildred, who was supposed to have been visiting in the southern part of the state, and the man—both unclothed. Asher said he had found them just like that; the lodge had been full of gas when he arrived and he had aired it out. It was a tragic accident, he

said, the result of a faulty gas heater in the bedroom."

"You believed this without question?" I asked him.

"Yes. I was stunned. I had always thought Mildred above such a thing as infidelity. She was young and beautiful, yes—but always so quiet, so refined . . ."

"Was Asher stunned as well?"

"He seemed to be, but he was quite calm. When I suggested immediately that we contact the proper authorities, he wouldn't hear of it. Think of the scandal, he said—the possible damage to his reputation and his career by sordid newspaper reportage. I asked what else we could possibly do, and in that cold, calculating way of his he told me we could dispose of the bodies ourselves, bury them somewhere at the lake. We could then concoct a story to explain Mildred's disappearance, say that she had left him because of marital incompatibility and gone back to Boston, where she was born. He insisted no one would question this explanation, because he and Mildred had few close friends and because of his reputation. As it happened, he was, of course, quite right."

"And you went along with this willingly?"

"What choice did I have?" Falconer said. "I'm not a forceful

personality, and at the time I respected Asher and his judgment as well; then too, as I told you, I was stunned. Yes, I went along with it. I helped Asher transport the bodies to a promontory a mile away, where we buried them beneath piles of small rocks."

Crane said, "So for six years you kept this secret—until today, until something happened this morning."

"Yes."

"These 'steps' Asher told you he'd take if you tried to leave his employ—were they threats of bodily harm?"

Falconer nodded tiredly. "He said he would kill me."

"Pretty drastic just to insure continued silence about the cover-up of two accidental deaths six years ago."

"Yes. I made the same statement to him."

"What did he say?"

"He told me the truth," Falconer said.

The answer seemed obvious now, and I said immediately, "That his wife and her lover didn't die by accident at all? That he had murdered them?"

"Yes. He found them in bed together, very much alive, and he was incensed; his massive ego had been affronted, the sin was unforgivable and therefore punishable

with maximum penalty and swiftness—that was how Philip Asher was. He struck them both unconscious with his fists. If I had looked at the bodies closely at any time I suppose I would have seen evidence of this, but in my distraught state I noticed nothing at all. Then . . . then he suffocated both with a pillow. I arrived before he could remove the bodies, and so he made up the story about the faulty gas heater. If I hadn't believed that story, if I hadn't gone along with his plan as I did, he said he would have killed me too, then and there."

I said, "His confession was this revelation you were talking about, wasn't it? When you found out you had been working for a murderer the past six years, that you had helped cover up cold-blooded murder—and having just been threatened with death yourself—you lost control and picked up the skull and bashed his head in with it."

"Not exactly," Falconer said, "not really. I was sickened by his confession, and by my part in the

whole ugly affair; I found myself loathing him, wanting to inflict pain on him. But I'm not a violent man; I suppose what I actually am is a coward, and if it had not been for his second revelation, *the* revelation, I would not have done what I did. I—"

Crane cut him off. "Damn it, Falconer, what is this revelation? Why did you kill him?"

"Because of something else he'd done, a year after the murders. I don't know why he told me about it, but he was quite mad, of course, and madmen don't require reasons, do they?"

Falconer exhaled shudderingly. "You see," he continued, "Asher's *memento mori* did not come from Mexico, as I had always believed; it came from that promontory at Lake Pontrain. I went into a blind rage and killed Philip Asher—using the one fitting weapon for his destruction—when I learned I had been working in that study of his all these years, all these years, with the skull of the only woman I had ever loved grinning at me over his shoulder . . ."



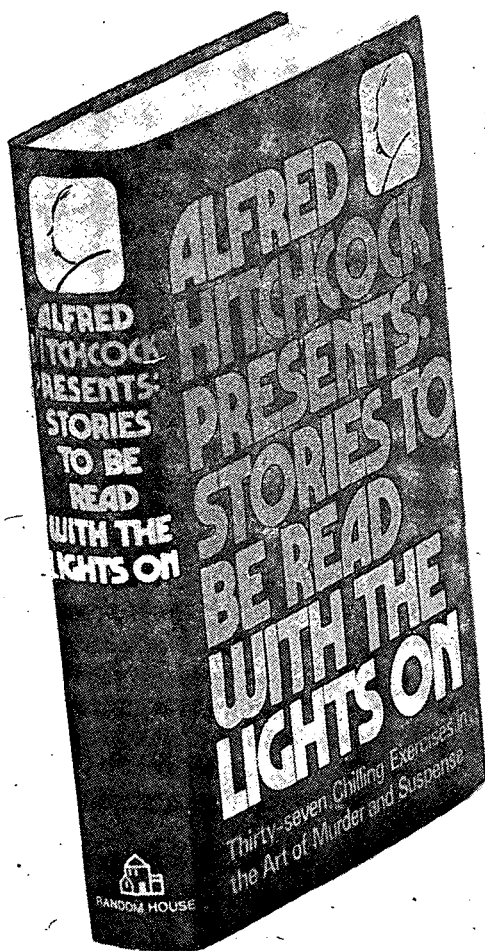
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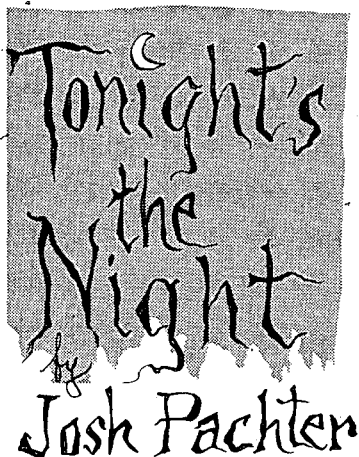
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Revenge, one finds, may take its toll in diverse—and surprising—means.




# Tonight's the Night

by Josh Pachter

Tonight is the night. I'm almost ready.

Twenty-five years I've waited. Twenty-five years of hatred building and festering inside me; but tonight—soon now—tonight is the night for revenge . . .

To be honest about it, I don't know what Laura ever saw in me in the first place, unless it was my sense of humor. I was not what you'd call handsome. I wasn't rich. I was smart enough to get along, but not so intelligent I could brag about it. I'd been a soldier, all right, and it was just



after the War, when a military uniform still meant something honorable, but I'd served in both the European and Pacific theaters without once distinguishing myself in any particular way.

Maybe it *was* my sense of humor. I always had a good-looking date on Saturday nights, and during the week, too, when I had time. I was *fun*, the girls said.

Maybe I *was* fun. I liked to laugh. I still do. Laughter is the universal language, the one common link between all races, classes, and creeds, the best medicine. I don't know. It's the answer to all problems, that's what it is.

Anyway, maybe it was my love of laughter that attracted Laura to me. She could have had her pick of any man she wanted. She was a vision, Laura, with flowing waves of soft golden hair caressing her smooth white shoulders, an alabaster face that Michelangelo would have been proud to have carved, and long, slender, delicate fingers with perfect, pearly nails at their tips. All the clichés came to life in Laura. She was a goddess.

I met her at a dance. I had brought another girl, Laura had come with another man. Laura and I left together. (My other girl and Laura's other man left that dance together, too. They were married three months later. Three months after that, Laura and I got engaged.)

Three months after *that*, Richard Davidson walked into the picture. Limped into the picture would be more like it, with his chunk of Nazi shrapnel in his leg and his Purple Heart and his damned moustache on his smug, handsome face.

He was clever, I grant him that; clever, crafty, sly. He first approached us one Sunday morning in church, just after Reverend Venable's sermon and the final hymn. He introduced himself as a newcomer to our town, and invited us to dine with him the following night. Right away I saw he was going to mean trouble; I knew it, felt it, but what could I say, there in church, especially with Laura so obviously intrigued by the brash invitation.

We went to his house the next evening. It was just the three of us, with no other woman to round out the party. Richard's intentions were clear from the first. He was charming, witty, sparkling with life, and he devoted himself en-

tirely to Laura. I tried to keep up my end, laughing at his jokes, agreeing with his shrewd political observations, but it was no use. It was almost as if I weren't even there.

Laura lapped it up. Richard was no richer than I was, but he managed to cover his table with better food than I had ever tasted before, and with wines I'd never heard of, with names I couldn't pronounce. The fear and resentment welling inside me choked me. I could hardly eat a thing, but Laura ate and drank and ate some more, laughing and smiling and totally oblivious to the fiancé she'd thought so much *fun* the day before.

We left soon after dinner. I had to go to work early the next morning, I said, and I needed to get some sleep. Richard offered to drive Laura home, if she wanted to stay a while longer. She looked at me, almost for the first time that evening, her clear blue eyes saying yes. I said no, frowning, and took her home.

Two nights later, she ate dinner with him again. I was not invited. My resentment began to boil over into hate.

That same weekend, Laura begged out of a date with me, pleading a headache. I called later, to see how she was. She

wasn't home. I had expected that.

Like I said, I love to laugh. So, when they came to me a few weeks later and Laura handed me back my ring, laid her cool white fingers on my trembling hand and told me she and Richard wanted to get married immediately, I forced a chuckle, told them no, of course there were no hard feelings, shook Richard's hand warmly, and asked if there was anything at all I could do to help them.

There was. Richard was new in town, he reminded me, and I was his only friend. So could I possibly see my way clear to . . . ?

Choking down the hatred that was blossoming into full flower within me, I accepted the "honor" Richard held out to me. The following week, when he married Laura, I stood beside him in church as his best man. I beamed through the ceremony, I handed him the ring with a smile, I kissed the bride, and all the while my heart was ready to explode.

The wedding supper was delicious, magnificent—Richard had selected the menu himself—and it was as I watched Laura gigglingly take a bite of the slice of wedding cake Richard held out to her that the idea erupted in my head, full-blown, completely developed.

I would get my revenge. Richard Davidson stole her, stole Laura, *my* Laura, and I would get my revenge!

It was honest laughter that bubbled from my lips as I threw rice at the happy couple, tripping down the front steps of the same church where Richard had first entered our lives, climbing into his car, roaring away on their honeymoon with strings of streamers and tin cans clattering merrily along behind them.

Yes. I would have my revenge yet . . .

Tonight is the night.

I have cultivated them, over the years, and now I am their friend, a frequent guest in their home. They invite me to dinner, and I bring cakes and chocolates as offerings of friendship. I have watched Laura, encouraged her, seen my revenge grow sweetly.

Tonight is the night. The time is now.

I lean forward. I tap Richard on the shoulder. He looks up, a wrinkled, gray-haired shell of a man, and I point across the room to where Laura, *his* Laura sits: two hundred pounds of rolling, pliant flesh, her face red and coarse, her hands raw and plump and cracked—and I laugh . . .



For "special delivery" one does, of course, expect special consideration.



Foley had paid for the cigarettes and was lingering by the counter, ripping off a corner of the pack, when the pretty dark-haired woman came into the drugstore.

She walked toward him, hip-swaying a little, which was pleasant to watch because her pink shorts and halter top revealed a figure as taut and graceful as a Russian gymnast's. She had blue eyes, skin the color of cream that's been lightly laced with coffee, a good-to-be-alive expression on her face, and a big dog on a leash at her heels. The dog was a standard size French poodle, kennel-cut. He danced along as



lightly and merrily as his mistress.

The woman came up beside Foley and plucked a copy of the daily newspaper from a stack beside the cash register. She folded the newspaper twice, creased it lightly down both edges, and held it out to the dog. "Here you are, Beau," she said in a happy voice. "You can carry it for me."

Beau eagerly took the newspaper in his mouth and sat back on his haunches, his tail jerking jauntily against the drugstore linoleum while he waited for his mistress to

pay the clerk for the newspaper.

Foley liked dogs. He put the partially opened pack of cigarettes in his pocket and bent down over the dog. "Hi, there, Beau," he murmured in the wheedling, caressing tone strangers usually

adopt when addressing unknown dogs. "You're a handsome old boy, aren't you?"

He held out one hand for the dog to sniff. When Beau's tail didn't stop wagging, Foley took hold of the newspaper in the



dog's mouth and pretended he was trying to pull it away from him. Beau thought it was a game. He shook his head and held onto the paper, his black eyes sparkling. He faked a menacing growl between his locked teeth.

Above his head, Foley heard the cash register ring. He straightened and smiled at the lady in pink as she accepted change from the clerk. "This is a fine dog," Foley said to her. "Poodles are the best."

The woman turned to him, nodding her agreement. The clerk behind the cigarette counter said, "He's smart, too. Carries the newspaper home every day, don't you, Beau?"

Beau wagged.

Foley said, "Poodles can't be beat for brains. Everybody admits that."

The lady in pink smiled at him, acknowledging his admiration for her dog and perhaps, also, the admiration she saw in Foley's eyes for the dog's mistress. Then, with a light pull on Beau's leash, she left the counter and went out. Beau followed sedately, with an air of great importance, holding his muzzle high so the newspaper in his jaws would ride safely.

Foley took a cigarette from his new pack and lit it. After a couple of drags he raised a hand

in farewell to the clerk behind the counter and pushed through the door to the sidewalk outside. He could see Beau and the pink lady walking north, about a block away.

It was the warmest time of the day, an hour after noon. Foley's shirt soon became damp with perspiration. He wondered how the girl in pink shorts and halter had managed to look so cool and fresh after walking her dog to the drugstore in this heat.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Harry and Ramon leave their inspection of the merchandise in the store window across the street, and start after him.

He didn't increase his speed, didn't give any sign he'd spotted them. They stayed on the opposite sidewalk until he turned onto Blakesley, two blocks from the drugstore, and headed for his flea-bag hotel. When he went into the hotel lobby—it was really nothing but a barroom with a hotel desk at the back by the foot of a stairway—Harry and Ramon closed up fast and followed him in.

The bar was deserted except for the fat bartender, seated precariously on a high stool and snoring raucously with his head on the bar, drunk already, at one o'clock, on his own booze.

Foley was on the first step of

the stairway at the back when Harry called to him. "Foley!"

Foley paused, turned, and squinted through the bar's dimness toward Harry and Ramon. He said, "Harry?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "You live in this joint?"

"Temporarily. How did you find me here?"

"Didn't," said Harry. "You shifted since last week from the address you gave Andy. How come?"

"Couldn't afford it anymore. You ought to know."

Harry grunted. "Lucky for you we spotted you going into that drugstore. Andy mighta thought you was trying to run out on him, otherwise."

"I couldn't afford to do that, either," Foley said. "What the hell do you want?"

"Talk to you," Harry said.

"What about? I told Andy last week I didn't have the money yet."

"I know you did." Harry and Ramon were at the foot of the stairway now. "Let's go up to your room."

Foley turned and led the way up the narrow stairs. At the top a shabby corridor ran the depth of the house. Six doors led off it. Foley went to the door nearest the stairhead and opened it with a

key. Harry and Ramon followed him. Ramon shut the door behind them.

Ramon was small and dark, with a tuft of black beard on his chin and one eye that toed out. Harry was built like a bull, with massive hunched shoulders and the delicate underpinning of a tight-rope artist.

Foley sat down on his unmade bed and said, "Well?"

"Andy thought maybe you'd have his money by now, is all," Harry said. His voice was light and thready, totally incongruous in a man of his bulk.

"I don't," Foley said. "I didn't have it last week and I don't have it now. Andy gave me another month to get it up. For another few points, of course." His tone was bitter. "You heard him. You were there."

"Yeah," Harry said. "But now, Andy thinks you can pay him off, after all—without waiting for that extra month."

Foley stared at him. "Pay him off with what?"

"With money, stupid. What else?" Harry gave a tenor giggle. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

"What money? I told you—"

Harry said to Ramon, "You hear that, Ramon? 'What money?' Foley says, as if he didn't have an idea in the world what we're talk-

ing about." Ramon's wandering eye turned outward toward Harry. His other eye didn't move at all. Foley was tempted to laugh but he thought he'd better not, just yet.

"What money are you talking about?" he asked.

"Andy heard you made a score yesterday."

"A score?" Foley was genuinely surprised. "What kind of a score?"

"Seneca Savings and Loan," Harry said. "Stickup."

Foley didn't say anything for a moment. Then he said, "What makes Andy think *I* did that job?"

The huge shoulders shrugged. "How does Andy find out any of the things he finds out? He just gets to know about them, that's all. It's business."

"Well, this is one thing he's wrong about. You can tell him that from me. I didn't even know there *was* a stickup yesterday until I read it in the paper this morning. Tell Andy I've been spending all my time trying to get up his money for him. But not that way."

"If not the Seneca Savings and Loan," Harry said, "then where?"

"Other loan sharks, that's where. I think Andy's got me blacklisted. I can't raise a dime."

"You think you could do it that way?" Harry asked con-

temptuously. "When you're into Andy for three thousand? And haven't got nickel number one to pay back? These things get told around, Foley."

"Where's he expect me to get his dough if I can't raise it from sharks?"

"We're right back where we started." Harry smiled. "Seneca Savings and Loan. Andy said you got five thousand in new hundreds there."

Foley said, "Andy's crazy."

Harry shrugged. "Or maybe you're holding out." He made a small motion of his hand and Ramon produced a short-barreled revolver from under his coat and pointed it at Foley's abdomen. His bad eye drifted erratically, Foley noticed, but the good eye never moved from Foley's face.

"What's that for?" Foley asked.

"Andy said to take a look," Harry answered. He came forward two steps, grabbed Foley by his upper arms and jerked him to his feet. Foley was as helpless as a baby to resist Harry's rubbery strength, even if he'd wanted to try. "Turn around, friend," Harry said.

Foley looked at Ramon's gun and turned around. He felt Harry's hands making a detailed and unhurried search of his clothes and person. Harry re-

moved from his pockets his new pack of cigarettes, a book of matches, a soiled handkerchief, a ball-point pen and thirty-four dollars and eighty-two cents in cash.

"Where's the money?" Harry asked, whirling Foley around to face him.

"The only money I've got is right there," Foley said, pointing to the bills and change Harry had tossed on the floor. "That's it. That's all of it. Thirty-four bucks. My entire fortune. Now do you see why I had to move to this dump?"

Harry didn't reply. He began methodically to search Foley's room. The cheap chest of drawers, the single drawer in the small wooden table with one short leg yielded nothing. So Harry tore the bed apart, slitting the mattress into ruin. He tapped around the floor, listening for a loose board. He opened the one grimy window in the room and searched its sill. Nothing. "Where's the can?" Harry asked.

"Down the hall, second door on the left," Foley said.

Harry went out. Ramon's gun kept Foley standing in the middle of his room beside the bed until Harry returned. "It ain't there," Harry said to Ramon.

For the first time, Ramon spoke. "Let me ask him," he said.

Harry giggled. "Okay, sport," he said, "go ahead. You think he's holding out?"

Ramon nodded. "I think so. Put his hand on the table."

Harry seized Foley's left wrist and shoved him near enough to the canted wooden table to force Foley's left hand down flat on its top. "Like this?" he said to Ramon.

Ramon nodded. He reversed his gun, and holding it by the short barrel, brought the butt down with a hard chop on Foley's little finger. Foley heard the bone snap like a twig breaking in an ice storm. He bit back a yell of pain and tried to pull his wrist from Harry's grip. Harry laughed at him and kept his hand spread out on the tabletop.

"Now," said Ramon, hefting the gun, "that is a sample. Every time you lie, another finger goes. Where is the money from Seneca Savings and Loan?"

Foley's face was pale, his lips stretched in a grimace of pain. His eyes, regarding the small man, were murderous. Yet his voice was comparatively calm and emotionless when he said, "Andy has a lot of clout in this town, I know, but not enough to cover you for a stupid thing like this. I'll tell you once more, I didn't do the Seneca job. I don't have the Seneca

money. I can't pay Andy what I owe him. Is that simple enough for you? You can break every finger I've got and you still can't change those facts."

Ramon said, "Hold his hand down, Harry," and raised his gun.

"Wait," Harry said. His grip loosened a little on Foley's wrist. He was thinking over, in his bear-like way, what Foley had said. Finally, he muttered, "That's enough, Ramon. For now. We better check with Andy."

Ramon shrugged his narrow shoulders. The gun slid from sight under his jacket.

Foley pulled his wrist from Harry's grip and cradled his broken finger tenderly in his other hand. He said, "Next time I see you, Ramon, I'm going to gut you like a fish."

Ramon smiled, his tuft of beard jerking with the movement of his lips. "Huh," he said, "you're scaring me to death, Foley." He wiped at his bad eye with the heel of his thumb.

Harry said in his high voice, "Sorry about the finger, Foley. Just goes to show that Andy don't like holdouts, even if you ain't one this time. For your sake, I hope you're leveling."

"Yeah," Foley said. "You got a very funny way of showing it."

Harry and Ramon left, tramping

down the steep stairway to the bar. When Foley was sure they weren't coming back, he went down the hall to the bathroom, shut himself in, ran cold water into the stained lavatory bowl and held the hand with the broken finger in the cold water until the pain began to subside. Then he went back to his room and lay down on his ruined mattress and thought what to do next.

At three o'clock, he got off the bed, swiped at his thick hair with a comb, straightened his tie and jacket, and scooped up the thirty-four dollars and eighty-two cents that still lay scattered on the floor. He put his injured hand in his jacket pocket and looked at himself in the cracked mirror over the chest of drawers. He figured he looked all right to appear on the streets without arousing comment.

He went to the foot of the stairs and inspected the bar-lobby which was now almost crowded with a dozen or so construction workers in hard hats, apparently taking a beer break from some job nearby. Foley decided not to chance going through the bar and out on Blakesley Street. Harry or Ramon might be waiting there for him . . . probably would be, he thought. Andy didn't have much faith in his clients' word.

Foley left through the hotel's back door which brought him out on a narrow alley that shimmered with heat waves. He went to the end of the alley and turned north on Wyandot, looking behind him at intervals. No one seemed to be following him.

Trying to fight off a feeling of foreboding, he found a telephone booth at a gas station, took out a dime, dropped it in the slot and dialed a number.

After three rings a happy contralto voice said, "Hello."

Foley thought the voice was just right for the lady in the pink shorts and halter top, whoever she was.

He said, "Is this the lady who owns a black standard poodle named Beau?"

"Yes," she answered gaily, "and who is this?"

"My name's Foley. I'm the man who spoke to you about your dog in the drugstore a couple of hours ago."

"Oh!" she said, and laughed. It sounded like a fall of crystal. "At last! I've been expecting you to call."

Foley felt his heart lift. Maybe it was going to work out after all. "Because of the money?" he asked carefully.

"Of course. I can't begin to tell you how surprised we were. I

thought it must be yours. It couldn't be anyone else's, could it?"

"It's mine," Foley said. "May I come and get it now? I'll explain when I see you."

"I live at 225 Roselawn Drive," she said promptly. "Do you know where that is?"

"I'll take a taxi. Are you going to be home for a while?"

"I'll be here," she said. "I'm dying of curiosity."

Foley came out of the booth and wiped his forehead with his soiled handkerchief. He put his injured hand back into his jacket pocket and stood at the corner by the gas station until a cruising cab came by. He hailed it.

She answered the door herself, with Beau at her side. She still wore the pink outfit. She said, "Come on in, Mr. Foley."

Beau gave a small yip of pleasure at renewing Foley's acquaintance and wagged his tail energetically.

She led Foley into a modest livingroom, tastefully furnished. An air-conditioning unit was purring in a rear window. The coolness was very welcome after the sticky heat of the outdoors.

She waved him into an easy chair and sat down on the edge of a ladderback chair herself, but she jumped up again immediately and



said, "How about some iced tea, Mr. Foley? Or a drink?"

"Iced tea would be great," he said. "I'm sorry, but I don't know your name, yet."

"Joan Francis," she said, smiling at him. "I won't be a minute." She went through a door, presumably to the kitchen, and soon reappeared with a pitcher of iced tea and two tumblers. "How did you know my telephone number if you didn't know my name?" she asked him curiously as she poured tea.

"Your telephone number's on Beau's collar tag. I noticed it in the drugstore."

"My, you're very observant! But then, I suppose you would be, under the circumstances . . . putting five thousand dollars into a dog's mouth."

He nodded. "I figured the drug-store clerk would know who you are, anyway, since you and Beau seemed to be regular customers."

When Beau heard Foley say his name, he came across the room with a rubber bone about the size of a turkey leg in his teeth, and squatted in front of Foley's chair. His shoe-button eyes begged Foley to play the pulling game with him again. Foley reached down with his good hand, gave the rubber bone several stiff tugs. Beau held on and pulled back hard, growling

his phony growl deep in his throat.

Joan Francis said, "You can imagine how I felt when your envelope of hundred dollar bills dropped out of Beau's newspaper."

"It was the only thing I could think of to do," Foley said seriously, "that seemed to offer any chance of getting my money out of that store safely—and getting the money back later." He thought he ought to say something more. "I apologize, Miss Francis, for mixing you up in such shady doings."

"Don't apologize, for Heaven's sake," Miss Francis said. "I'm enjoying myself tremendously. It's exciting! What I'm dying to know, of course, is why you had to get rid of your money right at that particular minute when Beau and I came into the store."

Foley sipped his iced tea. "I'll tell you the truth," he said. "That's the very least I can do for saving my money for me. You see, I owe several thousand dollars to a . . . a loan shark, I guess you'd call him. I told him last week that I couldn't pay him back when I was supposed to. And I couldn't. So he gave me a little extension of time. Then, to my great surprise, I won five thousand dollars playing poker several nights ago,

starting with a very small stake—my last twenty dollars. That five thousand is the money I put in Beau's newspaper today. And the reason I did was that just before you came into the drugstore, I happened to glance out through the store window and I saw two of my loan shark's henchmen lurking outside. He's a kind of gangster type, understand, and has what they call muscle men working for him, to collect money that's owed him. Anyway, his two muscle men were obviously waiting for me to come out of the drugstore. I immediately suspected they had learned somehow that I had won some money, and intended to collect it at once—by force, if necessary. You see what a bind I was in."

Miss Francis' eyes were wide with interest. "I've heard that loan sharks are really inhuman bloodsuckers," she said, wrinkling her nose with distaste. She paused momentarily, and Foley thought she looked slightly embarrassed. Then she said, "Maybe I'm just dumb, but if you won enough money to pay off your debt to the loan shark, why didn't you just simply pay it off?"

"I had a better use for the money," Foley said shortly.

"What better use?"

"Well, I have this older sister in

Columbus, Ohio." Foley looked glumly over Beau's head past Miss Francis' iced-tea pitcher, into a corner of the cheerful room. "She raised me in her home when our parents were killed in an auto accident. Now she's a widow, and poor, and had a stroke six weeks ago. That's what I borrowed the money for in the first place, to help pay her medical expenses, and that's how I'm going to use this five thousand, too. It's manna from heaven, almost. I figure my sister needs the money more than the loan shark does, for the moment. You have no idea how much it costs to keep somebody in a nursing home these days!"

"Oh. I'm terribly sorry about your sister, Mr. Foley. But don't you have a job or something? Some way to *earn* the money? Why go to a loan shark?"

Foley gave her a wry smile. "I'm a congenital loafer, I guess, Miss Francis. I make my living—or try to—by gambling. Cards, horses, you name it. And I've been in the middle of a king-size losing streak for six months now, until that poker game I mentioned." He finished his iced tea. "Now, may I have my money, please? I want to catch the afternoon bus for Columbus."

"When does it leave?"

"Five o'clock."

"Then you have plenty of time to satisfy my curiosity," Miss Francis said firmly. "There are still things you haven't told me."

"Such as what?"

"Such as whether the loan shark's muscle men *did* try to collect from you by force?"

Foley pulled his left hand out of his pocket and showed her his little finger. She gasped. The finger was badly swollen now; the flesh had turned a dark angry bruise-color.

"Mercy!" Miss Francis breathed. "They did hurt you, didn't they? Is it broken?"

He nodded.

"A doctor ought to see that right away," she said.

"I'll see a doctor as soon as you give me my money, Miss Francis."

She poured more iced tea. "I have the money," she said consideringly. "I'm just wondering how you knew I wouldn't deny any knowledge of it and keep it for myself?"

Foley said, "You looked to me like a completely honest woman. And Beau looked completely honest, too." He grinned at the dog.

"Thank you," Miss Francis said, "for both of us. It might interest you to know, though, that I *was* tempted at first. Honestly, I've never seen so much money all at once in my whole life! And there

was no possible way you could prove I was lying if I just kept the money. Then I thought, no, the money must belong to that nice man in the drugstore who spoke to Beau and liked poodles. And I decided to give you your money back, but I couldn't see how I was to find you. So I called my brother at his office and told him about the whole thing and he said I should keep the money until I heard from you. He was sure I *would* hear from you."

"Sound advice," Foley said, "for here I am, right?" He was getting impatient. "Now, where's the money, please, Miss Francis?"

She gestured casually to a desk under the window air-conditioner. "Over there. In the center drawer." He knew she was telling the truth. "In the same envelope, and everything. Only I wish you'd wait until my brother gets here, Mr. Foley. When I telephoned him you were coming for the money, he said he wished you'd wait till he gets here. He's on his way now. He wants to ask you some questions."

"About what?"

"Oh, you know. Identification and things like that, I suppose. My brother says we've got to be sure of our ground before we go getting careless with that much money."

Foley's hand was aching. He was anxious to get his money from this nice woman and leave, but he knew he mustn't seem too anxious. "I'll wait for him, in that case," he said. "I can't blame your brother for wanting to check me out. He sounds cautious enough to be a lawyer: Is he?"

"No," Miss Francis said, "he's not a lawyer. He's a police lieutenant in the robbery detail."

Foley winced as though somebody had broken another of his fingers. Miss Francis was watching him closely, with a curious apologetic look in her eyes. She said, "I noticed that the numbers on your hundred-dollar bills were all in sequence, Mr. Foley. That's really why I called my brother. He told me your money was stolen from Seneca Savings and Loan."

Foley jumped to his feet, barely restraining a cry of agony as he bumped his broken finger against the arm of the easy chair. Before he could make a move for the desk or the door, Miss Francis raised her voice in a sharp command to Beau. "Guard him,

Beaul" Foley temporarily froze.

Beau leaped in front of Foley and crouched like a coiled spring. The dog's shoe-button eyes were no longer glinting with mischief and merriment. They fastened on Foley's face and clung there. This time the deep growl in Beau's throat wasn't faked.

Foley was trying to make up his mind whether to risk the dog's teeth, even with one hand useless, when hurried footsteps sounded on the wooden flooring of the front porch. Foley could hear them over the purring of the air-conditioner. He eased his aching hand back into his jacket pocket and wordlessly sank back into his chair.

Lieutenant Francis had a uniformed cop with him. As they took Foley out between them, he looked back briefly at Miss Francis. Her expression was a mixture of uncertainty and sympathy.

"Do you really have a sick sister in Columbus, Ohio, Mr. Foley?" she asked him. It was not her usual happy-sounding voice.

Foley didn't answer her.



*Fear of disclosure frequently bestirs a quiescent conscience.*



# Play Death

**A**ddison Burke watched the little girl next door bury her doll. She scooped out the hole with a toy shovel, heaping the earth on one side; she placed the doll in the hole, took a last long look at the secret smile on the doll's face,

then began to shovel the dirt back.

Each shovelful onto the doll was a slow, scraping drumbeat; there was something terrible about it, and Addison stirred. The little girl stopped shoveling suddenly,

her eyes following his shadow back up to him. It was too late to draw his head back across the fence. Their eyes met.

He smiled. The little girl stared somberly. That was natural; kids breathed being into inanimate objects, made living things of them, took them seriously. The doll had "sickened" and "died" and the child was laying it to rest, that was all.

His smile died. Why wasn't the child weeping? Shouldn't that be the most enjoyable part of the play funeral? Children loved to shed hypocritical tears. Instead, now that he looked more closely,

by  
Edward  
Willen

the child wore faintly a secret, grave smile like the one on the doll's face. A fear grew in him as he stared at her. She couldn't know; she couldn't have seen him that day a month ago.

That day the sky had been a child's crayoning of summer heat. He was taking in the mail and sorting the letters as he walked. When he came to the bulky sealed envelope the trapped air in it startled him; giving to the pres-

sure of his fingers, it cried like a doll. He smiled; he had never given thought to it before, but he supposed now that something of the sort was what made a doll cry on cue: *Mama!* He squeezed the envelope again and laughed. Then his own diaphragm squeezed painfully as he noticed the writing on the envelope; he knew that arrogant hand.

It grew so still that he became aware there is never utter stillness; there was the crickets out-side, the constant sawing away at the air—then Genevieve's voice: "Anything for me?"

He handed her the letter; the envelope cried once more. She held it lazily till she saw the handwriting, then ripped it open and read it quickly. His eyes were on her as she read.

When she glanced up at him, she shocked him with her casual statement: "I'm leaving you."

He snatched the letter—a few bold sprawling words to the page—from her hand.

She smiled. "I'll tell you what it says. If I meet him at the dock we sail away together. If I don't show up he sails alone."

His voice trembled like the pages in his hand. "You're practically inviting me to lock you in until the boat sails."

Her eyelids fluttered but she

said calmly, "You can't lock me in forever. Once I'm out, I go away from here, from you, anyway. Either way you lose me. Why not be nice about it?"

Why not? To everyone he was that nice Mr. Burke. Everyone liked that nice Mr. Burke—and yet he felt sure everyone pitied and scorned that nice Mr. Burke because his young wife ran around. Suddenly he wasn't that nice Mr. Burke anymore, and there was no more anything for Gen.

He waited till evening to bury her. It was dark but the crickets had quickened, even so; it had grown hotter and closer. He was dripping perspiration by the time he struck softer earth. No one had been witness to the burial. Wait, there had been one witness; in the tree . . . No, that could only have been a bird.

Yet now there was the little girl playing at burial, imitating the real thing. How could she have seen? No window in her house faced that part of his grounds, the fence was too high, and on her side there was no tree she might have climbed. The fence itself, was there a hole in it? He drew back and almost at once he heard the slow, scraping drumbeat begin again.

Bending over, he moved along the fence. There it was—a knot-

hole, just about at her eye level. A hole was always so inviting to a kid. He could see her now through the hole, rapt in her shoveling. Had he seemed that rapt to her? But then, what would such a little girl have been doing up and out so late? Still, there had been the confusion attending the new arrival and it would have been easy for her to slip the parental eyes. That was it, then.

Even if the child never told of what she had seen, the burying of the doll would bring out the murder, sooner or later. Sooner, if the mother missed the doll and asked the child what had become of it; later, if the mother caught the child playing burial again. In any event, the child would say she was only doing what she had seen the man next door do. Then, though the mother might quickly dismiss this as a child's fantasy, in the mother's mind there would be the planted seed, the growing doubt, and there would be the reviving and sharpening of gossip.

Had Mrs. Burke really run away with another man? Or had that nice Mr. Burke murdered her and buried her in his garden? Sooner or later, polite but firm, the police would come; and to the happy amazement of all, they would find that, but for a little girl's imitating something she had seen with-

out understanding, that nice Mr. Burke would have gone on living the rest of his life in their midst at the scene of his secret crime.

For a moment he had an urge to vault the wall and wring the little girl's neck. It quickly passed—and not because he caught window vignettes of her mother tiptoeing from the crib to the kitchen. Even if the mother had not been in view he could never do that. Nor could he try to lure the child into his yard and contrive an accident, perhaps have her die in a fall while climbing the fence. No, he could never again reach the high point of fury.

He could kill only once—and that once was now in the past. Not quite true; he knew now that the moment of killing and the fear

of unearthing were both ever-present, would always be with him. He straightened stiffly and walked slowly—more in weariness than in unwillingness—into his house and into the kitchen and began to stuff the cracks.

Dorothy noticed the man had gone away and she was happy—until she heard her new baby brother James whimper and Dorothy's mother come running to see what was bothering him. Dorothy heard—and yet did not let herself hear—the picking up and the crooning and the patting. Dorothy finished the shoveling, then firmed the mound and smoothed the earth over the doll's grave, patting it and crooning softly, "Rest quiet, James."

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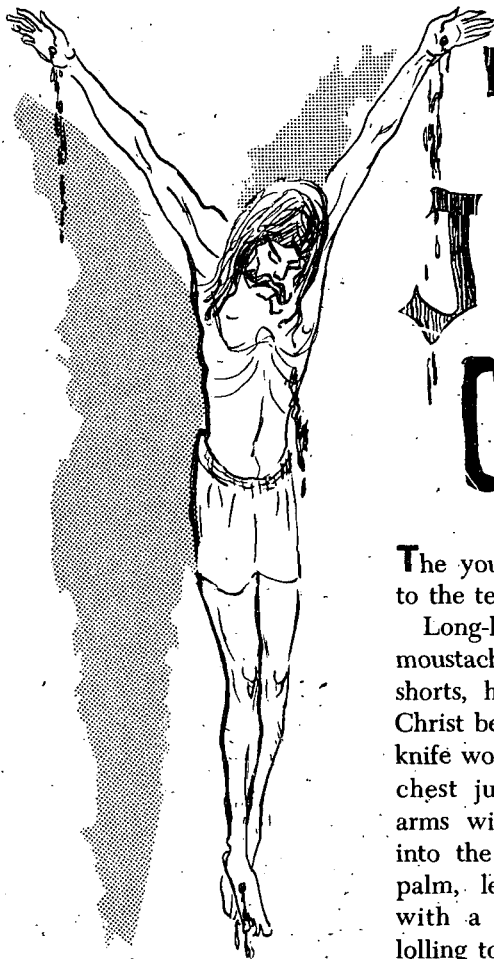
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*Disparaging misnomers may often encourage one to pursue his doubts in the search for reason.*



# The Jesus Case

The young man had been nailed to the tenement wall.

Long-haired, with a handlebar moustache, wearing only under-shorts, he hung like a latter-day Christ bereft of wooden crucifix, a knife wound on the left side of his chest just below the heart, his arms widespread, a spike driven into the wall through each open palm, legs crossed and impaled with a third large spike, head lolling to the side. A vagrant wino

had stumbled upon the body, but there was no telling how long he had been hanging there. The blood no longer ran from his wounds. He had soiled himself either in fright or in death, and his own rank stench mingled with the putrid stink of garbage in the empty room so that the two detectives turned away from the open doorframe and went out into the corridor where the air was only slightly less fetid.

Steve Carella was a tall, slender man with the gait of an athlete, brown eyes slanted curiously downward to give his face an Oriental cast. His partner, Meyer Meyer, was almost as tall, burlier, with pale-blue eyes and a bald head. The building was one in a long row of abandoned tenements

want to go in to examine the corpse.

"Why should I get all the bad ones?" he asked Carella. "All the jobs nobody else wants, I get. The hell with it. He can rot in there, for all I care. Let the hospital people take him down and cart him to the morgue. We'll examine him there, where at least I can wash my hands afterwards."

The ceiling above their heads was bloated with water that Monday morning, the plaster dangerously loose and close to falling. The room in which the man hung dead and crucified had one shattered window, and no door in its frame. It had been used as a makeshift garbage dump by the building squatters, and the garbage was piled three feet high, a

## A Novelette by Ed McBain

on North Harrison, infested with rats, inhabited for a time by hippies, discarded by them later when they discovered it was too easy to be victimized there by men and beasts alike. The word LOVE still decorated a wall in the hallway, painted flowers running rampant around it in a faded circle, but the dead man in the empty room stank, and the assistant medical examiner did not

thick carpet of moldering food, rusting cans, broken bottles, newspapers, and animal feces, topped with a swollen dead rat like a maraschino cherry. For anyone to have entered the room, it would have been necessary to climb up onto the ledge formed by the garbage. The ceiling was perhaps twelve feet high, and the man's impaled feet were crossed some six inches above the line of gar-

bage. He was a tall young man. Whoever had driven the spikes through his extended hands had been even taller, but the body had sagged of its own weight since, dislocating both shoulders and wreaking God knew what internal damage.

"You hear me?" the M.E. said.

"Do what you like," Carella answered. "Just make sure we get a full necropsy report."

"You think he was alive when they nailed him there?" Meyer asked.

"Maybe. The stabbing may have been an afterthought," Carella said.

"I'm not taking him down, and that's that," the M.E. said.

"Look," Carella said angrily, "take him down, leave him there, it's up to you. Just send us your damn report, and don't forget prints."

"I won't."

"Footprints, too."

"More crazies in this city," the M.E. said, and walked off sullenly, picking his way through the rubble in the corridor, and starting down the staircase to the street, where he hoped to sell his case to the ambulance people when they arrived.

"Let's check the rest of the floor," Meyer said.

There were two other apart-

ments on the floor. The locks on the doors to both had been broken. In one apartment were the remains of a recent fire in the center of the room. A worn tennis sneaker was in the corner near the window. Meyer lifted it with his handkerchief, and then bagged and tagged it for transportation to the lab. The second room was empty except for a soiled and torn mattress covered with rat-leavings.

"What a grubby dump," someone said behind them, and Meyer and Carella turned to find Detective Monaghan in the doorway. Detective Monroe was immediately behind him. Both Homicide cops had gray fedoras on their heads, black topcoats on their backs, and pained expressions on their faces.

"People actually *live* in these dumps, can you imagine that?" Monroe said.

"Incredible," Monaghan said, wagging his head. "Where's the stiff?"

"Down the hall," Carella said.

"Want to show me?"

"You'll find it," Carella answered.

"Come on," Monaghan said to his partner, and both of them went down the hallway, big-shouldered men pushing their way through the empty corridor as though dispersing a crowd. "What

a rotten mess!" Monaghan said.  
Monroe nodded.

There were footfalls on the steps. Two men in white picked their way over fallen plaster and laths, looked up when they reached the landing, saw Carella, and walked to him immediately.

"Listen, are you in charge here?" one of them asked.

"It's my case, yes," Carella said.

"I'm Dr. Cortez. What's this about wanting *me* to get somebody off the wall?"

"He's got to be taken to the mortuary," Carella said.

"Fine, we'll get him to the mortuary. But your medical examiner says he's *nailed* to the wall. I don't—"

"That's right."

"I don't plan to take him down, pal."

"Who do you suggest for the job?" Carella asked.

"I don't *care* who. You look strong enough, why don't you handle it yourself?"

"That's a murder victim in there," Carella said flatly.

"That's a corpse in there," Cortez answered, equally flatly.

Monaghan was coming back down the corridor, holding his nose. Monroe was a step behind him, his hand cupped over the lower part of his face.

"These men are from Homi-

cide," Carella said. "Talk to them about it."

"Who's supposed to take down the corpse?" Cortez asked.

"The M.E. through with it?" Monaghan asked.

"He won't examine it here," Carella said.

"He's *got* to examine it here. Those are regulations. We can't move the body till the M.E. examines it, pronounces it dead, and—"

"Yeah, go tell that to *him*," Cortez said.

"Where is he?" Monaghan asked.

"Downstairs. Puking out his guts."

"Come on," Monaghan said to his partner, and they headed for the staircase. "You wait here, Carella."

They listened to the two Homicide cops making their way downstairs. Their footfalls died. There was a strained silence in the corridor.

"Listen, I'm sorry I got so hot," Cortez said.

"That's okay," Carella answered.

"But he knows the regulations as well as I do. He's just trying to get out of a messy job, that's all."

"Uh-huh," Carella said.

"He knows the regulations," Cortez repeated.

The assistant medical examiner, if he had not previously known the regulations, knew them letter-perfect by the time Monaghan and Monroe got through with him downstairs. With a handkerchief tied over his nose, and wearing rubber gloves, he took down the impaled body of the unidentified white male, and performed a cursory examination before declaring him officially dead.

Everybody could now begin tackling the *next* unpleasant task of finding out who had made him that way.

The tennis sneaker found in the abandoned building was in shabby condition, a size twelve gunboat that had seen better days when it was worn on someone's left foot. The sole was worn almost through in one spot, and the canvas top had an enormous hole near the area of the big toe. Even the laces were weary, having been knotted together after breaking in two spots. The brand name was well known, which excluded the possibility of the sneaker having been purchased (as part of a pair, naturally) in any exotic boutique. The only thing of possible interest about this left-footed sneaker, in fact, was a brown stain on the tip of it, near the small toe. This was identified by the Police Labora-

tory as microcrystalline wax, a synthetic the color and consistency of beeswax, but much less expensive. A thin metallic dust adhered to the wax; it was identified as bronze. Carella was not particularly overjoyed by what the lab delivered. Nor was he thrilled by the report from the Identification Section, which had been unable to find any fingerprints, palm prints, or footprints that matched the dead man's.

Armed with a somewhat unflattering photograph (it had been taken while the man lay stone-cold-dead on a slab at the morgue), Carella went back to the Harrison Street neighborhood on Tuesday afternoon and tried to find someone who had known him.

The medical examiner had estimated the man's age as somewhere between twenty and twenty-five. In terms of police investigation, this was awkward. He could have been running with a younger crowd of teen-agers, or an older crowd of young adults, depending on his emotional maturity. Carella decided to try a sampling of each, and his first stop was a teen-age coffeehouse called *Space* which had, over the years, run the gamut from kosher delicatessen to Puerto Rican *bodega* to store-front church to its present

status. Carella went in smiling.

In contradiction to its name, *Space* was a ten-by-twelve room with a huge silver espresso machine on a counter at its far end. Like a futuristic idol, the machine intimidated the room and seemed to dwarf its patrons, all of whom were young. The girls were wearing blue jeans and long hair; the boys were bearded. In terms of police investigation, this also was awkward. It meant they could be (a) hippies, (b) college students, (c) anarchists, (d) prophets, (e) all of the foregoing. To many police officers, of course, long hair or a beard (or both) automatically meant that any person daring to look like that was guilty of (a) possession of marijuana, (b) intent to sell heroin, (c) violation of the Sullivan Act, (d) corrupting the morals of a minor, (e) conspiracy, (f) treason, (g) all of the foregoing. Carella wished he had a nickel for every clean-shaven, crew-cut kid he had arrested for murdering his own brother. On the other hand, he was a police officer and he knew that the moment he showed his badge in this place, these long-haired youngsters would automatically assume he was guilty of (a) fascism, (b) brutality, (c) drinking beer and belching, (d) harassment, (e) all of the fore-

going. Some days, it was very difficult to earn a living.

The cop smell seeped into the room almost before the door closed behind him. The kids looked at him, and he looked back at them, and he knew that if he asked them what time it was, they would answer in chorus, "The thirty-fifth of December." He chose the table closest to the door, pulling out a chair and sitting between a boy with long blond hair and a dark boy with a straggly beard. The girl opposite him had long brown hair, frightened brown eyes, and the face of an angel.

"Yes?" the blond boy asked.

"I'm a police officer." Carella showed his shield. The boys glanced at it without interest. The girl brushed a strand of hair from her cheek and turned her head away. "I'm trying to identify a man who was murdered in this area."

"When?" the boy with the beard asked.

"Sunday night. April eighteenth."

"Where?" the blond boy asked.

"In an abandoned tenement on Harrison."

"What'd you say your name is?" the blond boy asked.

"Detective Steve Carella."

The girl moved her chair back

and rose suddenly, as though anxious to get away from the table. Carella put his hand on her arm and said, "What's *your* name, miss?"

"Mary Margaret," she said. She moved her arm, freeing it from Carella's hand, then turned to go.

"No last name?"

"Ryan." To the boys she said, "See you guys," and this time moved several paces from the table before she was stopped again by Carella's voice.

"Miss Ryan, would you look at this picture, please?" and he removed the photo from his notebook. The girl came back to the table, looked at the picture, and said nothing.

"Does he look familiar?" Carella asked.

"No. See you," she said again, and this time she walked swiftly from the table and out onto the street.

Carella watched her leave and then handed the photograph to the blond boy. "How about you?"

"Nope."

"What's your name?"

"Bob."

"Bob what?"

"Carmody."

"And yours?" he asked the boy with the beard.

"Hank Scaffale."

"You both live in the neighbor-

hood, somewhere around here?"

"On Porter Street."

"Have you been living here long?"

"A while."

"Are you familiar with most of the people in the neighborhood?"

"The freaks, yeah," Hank said. "I don't have much to do with others."

"Have *you* ever seen this man around?"

"Not if he really looked like that," Hank said, studying the photo.

"What do you mean?"

"He's dead in that picture, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Yeah, well, that makes a difference," Hank said. "The juices are gone." He shook his head. "All the juices are gone." He studied the photograph further, and again shook his head. "I don't know who he is."

The responses from the other young people in the room were similar. Carella took the photograph around to the five other tables, explained what he was looking for, and waited while the dead man's frozen image was passed from hand to hand. None of the kids were overly friendly (you can get hit on the head by cops only so often before you decide there may not be a basis there for mu-

tual confidence and trust), but neither were they impolite. They all looked solemnly at the picture, and they all reported that they had not known the dead man. Carella thanked them for their time and went out onto the street again.

By five o'clock that afternoon, he had hit in succession two head shops, a macrobiotic food store, a record store, a store selling sandals, and four other places catering to the neighborhood's young people—or at least those young people who wore their hair long. He could not bring himself to call them “freaks” despite their apparent preference for the word. To his way of thinking, that was the same as putting an identifying tag on a dead man's toe before you knew who he was. Labels annoyed him unless they were affixed to case report folders or bottles in a medicine cabinet. “Freaks” was a particularly distressing label, demeaning and misleading, originally applied from without, later adopted from within in self-defense, and finally accepted with pride as a form of self-identification. Yet how in hell did this in any way lessen its derogatory intent? It was the same as cops proudly calling themselves “pigs” in the hope that the epithet would lose its vilifying power

once it was exorcised by voluntary application. No. Carella was not a pig, and the kids he'd spoken to this afternoon were not freaks. They were young people in a neighborhood as severely divided as any war-torn Asian countryside.

In the days when the city was young, or at least younger, the neighborhood population had been mostly immigrant Jewish, with a dash of Italian or Irish thrown in to keep the pot boiling. It boiled a lot in those days, and eventually simmered down to a sort of armed truce between the old-timers, whose children went to college or learned New World trades and moved out to Riverhead or Calm's Point.

The next wave of immigrants to hit the area were United States citizens who did not speak the language and who enjoyed all the rights and privileges of any minority group in the city; that is to say, they were underpaid, overcharged, beaten, scorned, and generally made to feel that Puerto Rico was not a beautiful sun-washed island in the Caribbean but rather a stinkhole on the outskirts of a smelly swamp.

The long-haired youths must have seemed like invading immigrants to the Puerto Ricans who still inhabited the area. The hippies, the flower children, the



"freaks," if you prefer, came seeking peace and talking love, and were greeted with the same fear, suspicion, hostility and prejudice that had greeted the Puerto Ricans upon their arrival. In this case, however, it was the Puerto Ricans themselves who were doing the hating—you cannot teach people a way of life, and then expect them to put it conveniently aside. You cannot force them into a sewer and then expect them to understand why the sons and daughters of *successful* Americans are voluntarily seeking residence in that very same sewer. If violence of any kind is absurd, then victims attacking other victims is surely ludicrous. Such was the situation in the South Quarter, where the young people who had come there to do their thing had taken instead to buying pistols for protection against other people who had been trying to do *their* thing for more years than they could count.

In recent months, bikies had begun drifting into the area, sporting their leather jackets and their swastikas and lavishing on their motorcycles the kind of love usually reserved for women. The bikies were bad news. Their presence added a tense note of uneasiness and unpredictability to an already volatile situation.

The Puerto Ricans to whom Carella spoke that afternoon did not enjoy talking to a cop. Cops meant false arrests, cops meant bribes, cops meant harassment. It occurred to him that Alex Delgado, the one Puerto Rican detective on the squad (in itself a comment), might have handled the investigation better, but he was stuck with it and so he plunged ahead, showing the picture, asking the questions, getting the same response each time: *No, I do not know him. They all look alike to me.*

The bikie's name was Yank, meticulously lettered in white paint on the front of his leather jacket, over the heart. He had long, frizzy black hair and a dense black beard. His eyes were blue, the right one partially closed by a scar that ran from his forehead to his cheek, crossing a portion of the lid in passing. He wore the usual gear in addition to the black leather jacket: the crushed peaked cap (his crash helmet was on the seat of his bike parked at the curb), a black T-shirt streaked white here and there from bleach-washing, black denim trousers, brass-studded big-buckled belt, black boots. An assortment of chains hung around his neck and the German Iron Cross dangled from one of them. He was sitting

on a tilted wooden chair outside a shop selling posters (LBJ on a motorcycle in the window behind him), smoking a cigar and admiring the sleek chrome sculpture of his own bike at the curb. He did not even look at Carella as he approached. He knew instantly that Carella was a cop, but bikies don't know from cops. Bikies, in fact, sometimes think they themselves are the cops, and the bad guys are everybody else in the world.

Carella didn't waste time. He showed his shield and his I.D. card, and said, "Detective Carella, 87th Squad."

Yank regarded him with cool disdain, and then puffed on his cigar. "Yeah?" he said.

"We're trying to get a positive identification on a young man who may have been living in the neighborhood . . ."

"Yeah?"

"I thought you might be able to help."

"Why?"

"Do you live around here?"

"Yeah."

"How long have you been living here?"

"Three of us blew in from the Coast a few weeks back."

"Transients, huh?"

"Mobile, you might say."

"Where are you living?"

"Here and there," Yank told him.

"Where's that?"

"We drop in various places. Our club members are usually welcome everywhere."

"Where are you dropping in right now?"

"Around the corner."

"Around the corner where?"

"On Rutland. Listen, I thought you were trying to identify somebody. What're all these questions about? You charging me with some terrible crime?"

"Have you got a terrible crime in mind?"

"The bike's legally parked, I was sitting here smoking a cigar and meditating. Is that against the law?"

"Nobody said it was."

"So why all the questions?"

Carella reached into his jacket pocket, took out his notebook, and removed from it the photograph of the dead man. "Recognize him?" he asked, and handed the picture to Yank, who blew out a cloud of smoke, righted his chair, and then held the picture between his knees, hunched over it as he studied it.

"Never saw him in my life," he said. He handed the picture back to Carella, tilted the chair against the wall again, and drew in another lungful of cigar smoke.

"I wonder if I could have your

full and real name," Carella said.

"What for?"

"In case I need to get in touch with you again."

"Why would you need to get in touch with me? I just told you I never saw this guy in my life."

"Yes, but people sometimes come up with information later on. Since you and your friends are so *mobile*, you might just possibly hear something that—"

"Tell you what," Yank cut in, and grinned. "You give me *your* name. If I hear anything, I'll call *you*." He blew two precise smoke rings into the air and said, "How's that?"

"I've already given you my name."

"Shows what kind of memory I've got," Yank said, and again grinned.

"I'll see you around," Carella said.

"Don't count on it," Yank answered.

"The Jesus Case," as it was playfully dubbed by the heathens of the 87th Squad, was going nowhere very quickly. The dead man had still not been identified, and Carella knew that unless a positive identification were made within the next few days, the case was in danger of being buried as deep as the corpse had been. Un-

til they knew who he was, until they could say with certainty that *this* man with *this* name was slain by person or persons unknown, he would remain only what Dr. Cortez had labeled him on Monday: a corpse. Anonymous; a lifeless heap of human rubble, unmissed, unreported, unidentified when it was buried in the municipal cemetery. There were too many murder victims in the city, all of them with names and addresses and relatives and histories. It was too much to ask of any overworked police department that it should spend valuable time trying to find the murderer of someone who had namelessly roamed the streets. A cipher never evokes much sympathy.

On Thursday morning, as Carella made his way from shop to shop in the Harrison Street area, it began raining heavily. The Jesus Case was now four days old. Carella knew that unless he came up with something soon, the case would be thrown into the squad's Open File. For all intents and purposes, such disposition would mean that the case was closed. Not solved, merely closed until something accidentally turned up on it weeks or months or years later, if ever. The idea of burying the case a scant two days after the body itself had been buried

was extremely distasteful to Carella. Aside from his revulsion for the brutality of the crucifixion, if such it could be called (there had, after all, been no cross involved), Carella suspected that something deeper within him was being touched. He had not been inside a church since the day his sister got married, more than thirteen years ago, but he felt vague stirrings now, memories of priests with thuribles, the heavy musk of incense, altar boys in white, the crucified form of Jesus Christ high above the altar. He had not been a religious child, nor was he a religious man, but the murdered man was curiously linked in his mind to the spiritual concept of someone dying for humanity. He could not accept the idea that the man in the abandoned tenement had died for nothing at all.

The rain swept the pavements like machine-gun fire in some gray, disputed no-man's-land. A jagged lance of lightning crackled across the sky, followed by a boom of thunder that rattled Carella to his shoelaces. He ran for the nearest shop, threw open the door, shook water from his trench coat, and mopped his head with a handkerchief. Only then did he look around him. He first thought he was in an art gallery having a one-man show. He then

realized he was in a sculptor's shop, the artist's work displayed on long tables and shelves, female nudes of various sizes sculpted in wood and stone, cast in plaster and bronze. The work was quite good, or at least it seemed so to Carella. Naturalistic, almost photographic, the nudes sat or stood or lay on their sides in frozen three-dimensional realism, some of them no larger than a fist, others standing some three or four feet tall. The artist had used the same model for all of the pieces, an obviously young girl, tall and slender, with small well-formed breasts and narrow hips, long hair trailing halfway down her back. The effect was of being in a mirrored room that reflected the same girl in a dozen different poses, shrinking her to less than human size and capturing her life force in materials firmer than flesh.

Carella was studying one of the statues more closely when a man came out of the back room. He was in his late twenties, tall, blond, with dark-brown eyes and a leonine head. He was on crutches. His left leg was heavily bandaged. A tattered white tennis sneaker was on his right foot.

There were, Carella surmised, possibly ten thousand men in this city at this moment who were



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wearing white tennis sneakers on their right feet, their left feet, and perhaps even *both* feet. He did not know how many of them had a shop on King's Circle, though, four blocks from Harrison Street, where a boy had been nailed to the wall five days ago, and where a left-footed tennis sneaker had been found in an empty apartment down the hall.

"Yes, sir?" the man said. "May I help you?"

"I'm a police officer," Carella said.

"Uh-huh," the man said.

"Detective Carella, 87th Squad."

"Uh-huh," he said again. He did not ask for identification, and Carella did not show any.

"I'm investigating a homicide."

"I see." The man nodded, and then hobbled on his crutches to one of the long tables. He sat on the edge of it, beside a sculpture in bronze of his slender young model at repose, legs crossed, head bent, eyes downcast like a naked nun. "My name's Sanford Elliot," he said. "Sandy, everybody calls me. Who was killed?"

"We don't know. That's why I've been going around the neighborhood."

"When did it happen?" Elliot asked.

"Last Sunday night."

"I was out of town last Sunday," Elliot said, and Carella suddenly wondered why the man felt compelled to establish an alibi for a murder that had thus far been discussed only in the most ambiguous terms.

"Really?" Carella said. "Where were you?"

"Boston. I went up to Boston for the weekend."

"Nice up there," Carella said.

"Yes."

"Anyway, I've been showing a picture of the victim . . ."

"I don't know too many people in the neighborhood," Elliot said. "I've only been here in the city since January. I keep mostly to myself. Do my work in the studio back there, and try to sell it out front here. I don't know too many people."

"Well, lots of people come in and out of the shop, don't they?" Carella said.

"Oh, sure. But unless they buy one of my pieces, I never get to know their names. You see what I mean?"

"Sure," Carella said. "Why don't you take a look at the picture, anyway?"

"Well, if you like. It won't do any good, though. I really don't know too many people around here."

"Are you from Boston origi-

nally?" Carella asked suddenly.  
"What?"

"You said you went up to Boston, so I figured—"

"Oh. No, I'm from Oregon. But I went to art school up there. School of Fine Arts at B.U. Boston University."

"And you say you were up there Sunday?"

"That's right. I went up to see some friends. I've got a lot of friends in the Boston area."

"But not too many around here."

"No, not around here."

"Did you hurt your leg before you went to Boston, or after you came back?"

"Before."

"Went up there on crutches, huh?"

"Yes."

"Did you drive up?"

"A friend drove me."

"Who?"

"The girl who poses for me." He made a vague gesture at the pieces of sculpture surrounding them.

"What's wrong with the leg, anyway?" Carella asked.

"I had an accident."

"Is it broken?"

"No. I sprained the ankle."

"That can be worse than a break, sometimes."

"Yeah, that's what the doctor

said to me too," Elliot replied.

"Who's the doctor?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Just curious."

"Well," Elliot said, "I don't think that's any of your business."

"You're right," Carella said, "it isn't. Would you mind looking at this picture?"

"I mean," Elliot said, gathering steam, "I've given you a lot of time as it is. I was working when you came in. I don't like being disturbed when I'm—"

"I'm sorry," Carella said. "If you'll just look at this picture . . ."

"I won't know who he is, anyway," Elliot said. "I hardly know any of the guys in this neighborhood. Most of my friends are up in Boston."

"Well, take a look," Carella said, and handed him the photograph.

"No, I don't know him," Elliot said, and handed it back almost at once.

Carella put the photograph into his notebook, turned up the collar of his coat, said, "Thanks," and went out into the rain. It was coming down in buckets; he was willing to forsake May flowers. He began running the instant he hit the street, and did not stop until he reached the open diner on the corner. Inside, he expelled his

breath in the exaggerated manner of all people who have run through rain and finally reached shelter, took off his trench coat, hung it up, and sat at the counter. A waitress slouched over and asked him what he wanted. He ordered a cup of coffee and a cheese Danish.

There was a lot that bothered him about Sanford Elliot. He was bothered by the tattered white tennis sneaker, and he was bothered by the fact that a man with his left foot in bandages does not need a sneaker on that foot—or was it only coincidence that the sneaker they'd found was left-footed? He was bothered by the speedy alibi Elliot had offered for his whereabouts on the night of the murder, and bothered by the thought of a man on crutches taking a long car trip up to Boston, even if he were being driven by someone.

Why hadn't Elliot been willing to tell him the name of his doctor; and how had Elliot known that the murder victim was a man? Even before Carella showed him the photograph, he had said, "I won't know who he is, anyway." *He*. Up to that time, Carella had spoken of the dead man only as "the victim."

Something else was bothering him.

The waitress put his cup of coffee on the counter, sloshing it into the saucer. He picked up his Danish, bit into it, put it down, lifted the coffee cup, slipped a paper napkin between cup and saucer, drank some coffee, and suddenly knew what was nudging his memory.

He debated going back to the shop.

Elliot had mentioned that he'd been working when Carella came in; the possibility existed that the girl was still with him. He decided instead to wait a while and talk to her alone, without Elliot there to prompt her.

Carella hit four apartment buildings on Porter Street before he found a mailbox listing for Henry Scaffale. He climbed the steps to the third floor, listened outside Apartment 32, heard voices inside but could not distinguish what they were saying. He knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" a man's voice asked.

"Me," Carella said. "Detective Carella."

There was a short silence. Carella waited. He heard someone approaching the door. It opened a crack, and Bob Carmody looked out.

"Yes?" he said.



"Is Mary Margaret here?"

"Maybe."

"I'd like to talk to her."

"What about?"

"Is she here?"

"Maybe you'd better come back with a warrant," Bob said, and began closing the door.

Carella immediately wedged his foot into it, and said, "I can do that, Bob, but going all the way downtown isn't going to sweeten my disposition by the time I get back. What do you say?"

"Let him in, Bob," a girl's voice said.

Bob scowled, opened the door, and stepped aside to let Carella in. Mary Margaret was sitting on a mattress on the floor. A chubby girl wearing a pink sweater and jeans was sitting beside her. Both girls had their backs to the wall. Hank was straddling a kitchen chair, his chin on his folded arms, watching Carella as he came into the room.

"Hello, Mary Margaret," Carella said.

"Hello," she answered without enthusiasm.

"I'd like to talk to you."

"Talk," she said.

"Privately."

"Where would you suggest? There's only one room and a john."

"How about the hallway?"

Mary Margaret shrugged, shoved her long hair back over her shoulders with both hands, rose with a dancer's motion from her cross-legged position, and walked barefooted past Carella into the hallway. Carella followed her out and closed the door behind them.

"What do you want to talk about?" she asked.

"Do you pose for an artist named Sandy Elliot?"

"Why?" Mary Margaret asked. "Is that against the law? I'm nineteen years old."

"No, it's not against the law."

"So, okay, I pose for him. How'd *you* know that?"

"I saw some of his work. The likeness is remarkable." Carella paused. "Do you also *drive* for him?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Did you drive him up to Boston last weekend?"

"Yes," Mary Margaret said.

"Were you posing for him today when I went to the shop?"

"I don't know when you went to the shop."

"Let's take just the first part. Were you posing for him today?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"From ten o'clock on."

"I was there about eleven."

"I didn't know that."

"Sandy didn't mention my visit?"

"No."

"When did he hurt his leg, Mary Margaret?"

"I don't know."

"When was the last time you posed for him?"

"Before today, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Last Thursday."

Carella took a small celluloid calendar from his wallet and looked at it. "That would be Thursday, the fifteenth."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Was he on crutches at that time?"

"Yes."

"When did you pose for him before that?"

"I pose for him every Thursday morning."

"Does that mean you posed for him on Thursday, April eighth?"

"Yes."

"Was he on crutches then?"

"No."

"So he hurt himself sometime between the eighth and the fifteenth, is that right?"

"I guess so. What difference does it make *when* he—"

"Where'd you go in Boston?"

"Oh, around."

"Around where?"

"I don't know Boston too well. Sandy was giving me directions."

"When did you leave here?"

"Friday."

"Friday, the sixteenth?"

"Yes. Last Friday. Right."

"What kind of car did you use?"

"Sandy's."

"Which is what?"

"Little Volkswagen."

"Must have been uncomfortable. Crutches and all. How long did it take you to get up there?"

"Oh, I don't know. Four, five hours. Something like that."

"What time did you leave?"

"Here? The city?"

"Yes."

"In the morning."

"What time in the morning?"

"Nine? Ten? I don't remember."

"Did you come back down that night?"

"No. We stayed a few days. In Boston."

"Where?"

"One of Sandy's friends."

"And came back when?"

"Late Monday night."

"And today, you posed for Sandy again."

"That's right."

"How much does he pay you?"

Mary Margaret hesitated.

"How much does he pay you?"

Carella asked again.

"Sandy's my boyfriend," she said. "He doesn't pay me any-

thing. Wouldn't you do the same?"

"Where do you pose?"

"In the back of his shop. He's got his studio there. In the back."

"Are you living with him, Mary Margaret?"

"I live here. But I spend most of my time with Sandy."

"Would you know the name of the doctor who treated his foot?"

"No."

"What happened to it, anyway?"

"He had an accident."

"Fell, did he?"

"Yes."

"And tore the Achilles tendon, huh?"

"Yes."

"Mary Margaret, do you think Sandy might have known that man in the picture I showed you?"

"Go ask Sandy."

"I did."

"So what did he say?"

"He said no."

"Then I guess he didn't know him."

"Did you know him?"

"No."

"You want to know what I think, Mary Margaret?"

"What?"

"I think Sandy was lying."

Mary Margaret shrugged.

"I think you're lying, too."

"Why would I lie?"

"I don't know yet," Carella said.

On Friday morning, Steve Carella went down to the Criminal Courts Building and, being duly sworn, deposed and said in writing:

1. I am a detective in the Police Department assigned to the 87th Detective Squad.

2. I have information based upon my personal knowledge and belief and facts disclosed to be by the medical examiner that a murder has been committed. Investigation discloses the following:

On April 19th, at 10:15 a.m., George Mossler, a vagrant, discovered the body of an unidentified man in Apartment 51 of an abandoned tenement building at 433 North Harrison Street. The victim had been stabbed in the chest and nailed to the wall, a spike through each extended palm and a third spike through his crossed feet. Medical examiner states cause of death to be cardiac hemorrhage due to penetrating knife wound, and sets time of death as sometime during the night of April 18th.

A search of the building at 433 North Harrison Street resulted in the finding of a size twelve, left-footed, white tennis sneaker in Apartment 52 which is down the

hall from Apartment 51 where the body was discovered.

On April 22nd, while showing pictures of the body of the dead man to people in the neighborhood where the body was found, investigator entered the shop of Sanford Elliot, located at 1211 King's Circle, approximately four blocks from the North Harrison Street address. Sanford Elliot was on crutches and his left foot was bandaged. On his right foot was a white sneaker similar to the left-footed one found at the murder scene. When questioned, Sanford Elliot stated that he had been in Boston on the night of April 18th and did not know or recognize the picture of the man found murdered at the North Harrison Street address.

3. Based upon the foregoing reliable information and upon my personal knowledge, there is probable cause to believe that aforementioned tennis sneaker constitutes evidence in the crime of murder and may be found in the possession of Sanford Elliot or at premises 1211 King's Circle, ground floor rear.

Wherefore, I respectfully request that the court issue a warrant and order of seizure, in the form annexed authorizing the search of Sanford Elliot and of premises 1211 King's Circle,

ground floor rear, and directing that if such property or evidence or any part thereof be found that it be seized and brought before the court; together with such other and further relief that the court may deem proper.

No previous application in this matter has been made in this or any other court or to any other judge, justice, or magistrate . . .

Carella realized that the application was weak in that there was no way of connecting Elliot with the murder except through the sneaker, and sneakers were, after all, fairly common wearing apparel. He knew, too, that a warrant issued on his application might possibly be later controverted on a motion to suppress the evidence seized under it. He was somewhat surprised, but nonetheless grateful, when a Supreme Court judge signed and dated the application, and issued the requested warrant.

This meant that Carella now had the legal right to arrest an inanimate object, so to speak.

Sanford Elliot was working when Carella went over with his search warrant. The long wooden table at which he sat was spattered with daubs of wax. A round biscuit tin was near his right elbow, half full of molten wax, a

naked electric light bulb shining into its open top to keep it soft. Elliot dipped into the can with fingers or wire-end tool, adding, spreading, molding wax onto the small figure of the nude on the table before him. He was thoroughly engrossed in what he was doing, and did not look up when Carella walked into the studio from the front of the shop. Carella did not wish to startle him. The man may have figured in a murder, and a startled murderer is a dangerous one. He hesitated just inside the curtain that divided the studio from the front, and then coughed. Elliot looked up immediately.

"You," he said.

"Me," Carella answered.

"What is it this time?"

"Do you always work in wax, Mr. Elliot?"

"Only when I'm going to cast something in bronze."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't give art lessons," Elliot said abruptly. "What do you want?"

"This is what I want," Carella said, and walked to him and handed him the search warrant:

IN THE NAME OF THE  
PEOPLE OF THIS STATE TO  
ANY POLICE OFFICER IN  
THIS CITY:

Proof by affidavit having been

made this day by Detective Stephen L. Carella that there is probable cause for believing that certain property constitutes evidence of the crime of murder or tends to show that a particular person has committed the crime of murder:

YOU ARE THEREFORE COMMANDED, between the hours of 6:00 A.M. and 9:00 P.M. to make an immediate search of the ground floor rear of premises 1211 King's Circle, occupied by Sanford Elliot, and of the person of Sanford Elliot and of any other person who may be found to have such property in his possession or under his control or to whom such property may have been delivered, for a size twelve, right-footed, white tennis sneaker, and if you find such property or any part thereof, to bring it before me at the Criminal Courts Building in this county.

This warrant must be executed within ten days of the date of issuance . . .

Elliot read the warrant, checked the date and the signature of the Supreme Court justice, and then said, "*What sneaker?* I don't know what you're talking about."

Carella looked down at his right foot. Elliot was no longer wearing the sneaker; instead, there was a leather sandal on his foot.

"You were wearing a sneaker the last time I saw you. That search warrant gives me the right to look for it."

"You're out of your mind," Elliot said.

"Am I?"

"I've never worn sneakers in my life."

"I'll just look around, if you don't mind."

"How can I stop you?" Elliot said sarcastically, and went back to work.

"Want to tell me about the wax?" Carella said. He was roaming the studio now, looking for a closet or a cupboard, the logical places one might put a sneaker. There was a second curtain hanging opposite the door leading to the shop, and Carella figured it might be covering the opening to a closet. He was mistaken. There was a small sink-refrigerator-stove unit behind the curtain. He stepped on the foot lever to open the refrigerator door and discovered that it was full of arms, legs, breasts, and heads. They had all been rendered in wax, to be sure, but the discovery was startling nonetheless, somewhat like stumbling upon the remains of a mass Lilliputian dismemberment. "What are these?" Carella said.

"Parts," Elliot answered. He had obviously decided not to be

cooperative, responsive, or even polite. His attitude was not exactly surprising; his visitor had come into the studio with a piece of paper empowering him to go through the place from top to bottom.

"Did you mold them?"

"Yes," Elliot said.

"I suppose you keep them in here so they won't melt."

"Brilliant."

"Why do you keep them at all?"

"I made up a batch from rubber molds," Elliot said. "I use them as prototypes, changing them to fit a specific pose."

Carella nodded, closed the refrigerator, and began wandering the studio again. He found what he thought was a packing crate, but when he lifted the lid, he discovered that Elliot stored his clothes in it. He knelt and began going through the crate, being careful not to disturb the order in which blue jeans and sweaters, shirts and socks, underwear and jackets were arranged. A single sandal was in the crate, the mate to the one Elliot was now wearing. There were also two pairs of loafers; but no sneaker. Carella put the lid onto the crate again.

"Why do you model in wax if it's so perishable?" he asked.

"I told you, I only do it when

I'm going to be casting in bronze." Elliot put down the wire-end tool in his hand, turned to Carella and patiently said, "It's called *cire-perdue*, the lost-wax method. A mold is made of the piece when it gets to the foundry, and then the wax is melted out, and molten bronze is poured into the mold."

"Then the original wax piece is lost, is that right?"

"Brilliant," Elliot said again, and picked up a fettling knife.

"What do you do when you get the bronze piece back?"

"Chisel or file off the fins, plug any holes, color it, polish it, and mount it on a marble base."

"What's in here?" Carella asked, indicating a closed door.

"Storage."

"Of what?"

"Larger pieces. Most of them in plaster."

"Mind if I take a look?"

"You're hot stuff, you know that?" Elliot said. "You come around with a search warrant, and then you go through the charade of asking me whether or not you can—"

"No sense being uncivilized about it, is there?"

"Why not? I thought you were investigating a murder."

"I didn't think you realized that, Mr. Elliot."

"I realize it fine. And I've already told you I don't know who the dead man—"

"Yes, you've already told me. The trouble is, I don't happen to believe you."

"Then don't be so polite," Elliot said. "If I'm a murder suspect, I don't need your good manners."

Carella went into the storage room without answering. As Elliot had promised, the room contained several larger pieces, all done in plaster, all unmistakably of Mary Margaret Ryan. A locked door was at the far end of the room. "Where's that door go?" Carella asked.

"What?" Elliot said.

"The other door here."

"Outside. The alley."

"You want to unlock it for me, please?"

"I don't have a key. I never open that door. It's locked all the time."

"I'll have to kick it open, then."

"Why?"

"Because I want to see what's out in that alley."

"There's nothing out in that alley."

There were prints in the plaster dust on the floor, easily identifiable prints left by someone's right foot; on either side of them, there were circular marks that might have been left by the rub-

ber tips of crutches. The prints led directly to the alley door.

"What do you say, Elliot? Are you going to open it for me?"

"I told you I don't have a key."

"Fine," Carella said, and kicked the door out without another word.

"Are you allowed to do that?"

"Sue me," Carella said, and went out into the alley. A garbage can and two cardboard boxes full of trash were stacked against the brick wall. In one of the cardboard cartons, Carella found the sneaker Elliot had been wearing yesterday. He came back into the studio, showed the sneaker to Elliot and said, "Ever see this before?"

"Never."

"I figured you wouldn't have," Carella said. "Mr. Elliot, at the risk of sounding like a television cop, I'd like to warn you not to leave the city."

"Where would I go?" Elliot asked.

"Who knows? You seem to have a penchant for Boston. Take my advice and stay put till I get back to you."

"What do you hope to get from a moldy sneaker?" Elliot said.

"Maybe some wax that *didn't* get lost," Carella answered.

On Saturday morning, while

Carella was waiting for a lab report on the sneaker he had found in Elliot's trash, he made a routine check of the three hospitals in the area, trying to discover if and when a man named Sanford Elliot had been treated for a sprained ankle. The idea of calling all the private physicians in the area was out of the question, of course. If Carella had not hit pay dirt with any of the hospitals, he would have given up this line of investigation at once; but sometimes you get lucky. On Saturday, April 24, Carella got lucky on the second call he made.

The intern on duty in the emergency room of Buenavista Hospital was a Japanese named Dr. Yukio Watanabe. He told Carella that business was slow at the moment and that he was free to check through the log; had Carella called an hour ago, he'd have been told to buzz off fast because the place had been thronged with victims of a three-car highway accident.

"You never saw so much blood in your life," Watanabe said; almost gleefully, Carella thought. "Anyway, what period are you interested in? I've got the book right here in front of me."

"This would have been sometime between the eighth and fifteenth," Carella said.



"This month?" Watanabe asked.

"Yes."

"Okay, let's take a look. What'd you say his name was?"

"Sanford Elliot."

There was a long silence on the line. Carella waited.

"I'm checking," Watanabe said.

"Sprained ankle, huh?"

"That's right."

"Nothing so far."

"Where are you?"

"Through the eleventh," Watanabe said, and fell silent again.

Carella waited.

"Nothing," Watanabe said at last. "You sure it was between those dates?"

"Could you check a bit further for me?"

"How far?"

"Through the next week, if you've got time."

"We've always got time here until somebody comes in with a broken head," Watanabe said. "Okay, here we go. Sanford Elliot, right?"

"Right."

Watanabe was silent. Carella could hear him turning pages.

"Sanford Elliot," Watanabe said. "Here it is."

"When did he come in?"

"Monday morning, April nineteenth."

"What time?"

"Ten past seven. Treated by Dr.

Goldstein." Watanabe paused. "I thought you said it was a sprained ankle."

"Wasn't it?"

"Not according to this. He was treated for third-degree burns. Foot, ankle, and calf of the left leg."

"I see," Carella said.

"Does that help you?"

"It confuses me. But thanks, anyway."

"No problem," Watanabe said, and hung up.

Carella stared at the telephone. It was always good to stare at the telephone when you didn't have any ideas. There was something terribly reassuring about the knowledge that the telephone itself was worthless until a bell started ringing. Carella waited for a bell to start ringing. Instead, the telephone on Meyer's desk rang, and Meyer picked up the receiver. "87th Squad," he said. He listened silently for a moment, and then said, "Hold on, will you? I think you want Carella." He handed the receiver to him, and said, "It's the lab. They've got a report on your tennis sneaker."

Through the plate-glass window of Sanford Elliot's shop, Carella could see him inside with two bikies. He recognized one of them as Yank, the cigar-smoking heavy-

weight he had spoken to on Tuesday. Yank was wandering around the shop, examining the pieces of sculpture, paying scant attention to Elliot and the second bkie, who was wagging his finger in Elliot's face like a district attorney in a grade-C flick. Elliot leaned on his crutches, and listened solemnly to what was being said, occasionally nodding. At last, the second bkie turned away from the counter, tapped Yank on the arm, and started out of the shop.

Carella moved swiftly into the adjacent doorway. As the pair passed by, he caught a quick glimpse of Yank's companion—short, brawny, with a pockmarked face and a sailor's rolling gait, the name "Ox" lettered on the front of his jacket. As they went off, Carella heard Yank burst into laughter.

He waited several moments, came out of the doorway, and went into Elliot's shop. "See you had a couple of art lovers in here," he said. "Did they buy anything?"

"No."

"What did they want?"

"What do *you* want?" Elliot asked.

"Some answers."

"I've given you all the answers I've got."

"I haven't given you all the

questions yet," Carella countered.

"Maybe you'd better advise me of my rights first."

"This is a field investigation, and you haven't been taken into custody or otherwise detained, so please don't give me any crap about rights. Nobody's violating your rights. I've got a few simple questions, and I want a few simple answers. How about it, Elliot? I'm investigating a homicide here."

"I don't know anything about any homicide."

"Your sneaker was found at the scene of the crime."

"Who says so?"

"I say so. And the police lab says so. How did it get there, Elliot?"

"I have no idea. I threw that pair of sneakers out two weeks ago. Somebody must've picked one of them out of the trash."

"When I picked it out of the trash yesterday, you said you'd never seen it before. You can't have it both ways, Elliot. Anyway, you couldn't have thrown them out two weeks ago, because I saw you wearing one of them only two *days* ago. What do you say? You going to play ball, or do you want to take a trip to the station house?"

"For what? You going to charge me with murder?"

"Maybe. I might take a notion to."

"I don't think you will," Elliot said. "I'm not a lawyer; but I know you can't build a case on a sneaker you found in an abandoned tenement."

"How do *you* know where we found that sneaker?"

"I read about the murder in the papers."

"How do you know which murder I'm investigating?"

"You showed me a picture, didn't you? It doesn't take a mastermind to tie the newspaper story to—"

"Get your hat, Elliot. I'm taking you to the station house."

"You can't arrest me," Elliot said. "Who the hell do you think you're kidding? You've got nothing to base a charge on."

"Haven't I?" Carella said. "Try this for size. It's from the code of Criminal Procedure. *A peace officer may, without a warrant, arrest a person when he has reasonable cause for believing that a felony has been committed, and that the person arrested has committed it . . .*"

"On the basis of a *sneaker*?" Elliot said.

"... *though it should afterwards appear,*" Carella continued, "that no felony has been committed, or, if committed, that the person arrested did not commit it.

All right, Elliot, I *know* a felony was committed on the night of April eighteenth, and I *know* an article of clothing belonging to you was found at the scene of the crime, and that's reasonable cause for believing you were there either before or after it happened. Either way, I think I've got justifiable cause for arrest. Would you like to tell me how you sprained your ankle? Or is it a torn Achilles tendon?"

"It's a sprained ankle."

"Want to tell me about it? Or shall we save it for the squad room?"

"I would not like to tell you anything. And if you take me to the squad room, you'll be forced to advise me of my rights. Once you do that, I'll refuse to answer any questions, and—"

"We'll worry about that when we get there."

"You're wasting your time, Carella, and you know it."

The men stared at each other. There was a faintly superior smirk on Elliot's mouth, a confident challenge in his eyes. Against his better judgment, Carella decided to pick up the gauntlet.

"Your ankle *isn't* sprained," he said. "Buenavista Hospital reports having treated you for third-degree burns on April nineteenth, the morning after the murder."

"I've never been to Buenavista Hospital in my life."

"Then someone's been using your name around town, Elliot."

"Maybe so."

"You want to unwrap that bandage and show me your foot?"

"No."

"Am I going to need another warrant?"

"Yes. Why don't you just go get yourself one?"

"There were remains of a small fire in one of the rooms . . ."

"Go get your warrant. I think we're finished talking."

"Is that where you had your accident, Elliot? Is that where you burned your foot?"

"I've got nothing more to say to you."

"Okay, have it your way," Carella said angrily, and opened the front door. "I'll be back."

He slammed the door shut behind him and went out onto the street, no closer to a solution than he had been when he walked into the shop. There were three incontrovertible facts that added up to evidence of a sort, but unfortunately not *enough* evidence for an arrest. The sneaker found in that tenement was unquestionably Elliot's. It had been found in the corner of a room that contained the dead ashes of a recent fire; and Elliot had been treated for

burns on April 19, the morning after the murder. Carella had hoped Elliot might be intimidated by these three seemingly related facts, and then either volunteer a confession or blurt out something that would move the investigation onto firmer ground—but Elliot had called the bluff. A charge on the basis of the existing evidence alone would be kicked out of court in three minutes flat. Moreover, Elliot's rights were securely protected; if arrested, he would have to be warned against saying anything self-incriminating, and would undoubtedly refuse to answer any questions without an attorney present. Once a lawyer entered the squad room, he would most certainly advise Elliot to remain silent, which would take them right back to where they'd started: a charge of murder based on evidence that indicated only possible presence at the scene of a crime.

Carella walked rapidly toward his parked car.

He was certain of only one thing: if Sanford Elliot *really* knew nothing at all about what had happened on the fifth floor of 433 North Harrison on the night of April 18, he would be answering any and all questions willingly and honestly; but he was *not* answering willingly, and he was ly-

ing whenever he *did* answer. Which brought Carella to the little lady with the long brown hair, the frightened brown eyes, and the face of an angel—Mary Margaret Ryan—as sweet a young lass as had ever crossed herself in the anonymous darkness of a confessional. Mary Margaret Ryan, bless her soul, had told Carella that she and Elliot had come down from Boston late Monday night, but Elliot's foot had been treated at Buenavista on Monday morning. Which meant that Mary Margaret perhaps had something to tell her priest the next time she saw him. In the meantime, seeing as how Mary Margaret was a frightened, slender little wisp of a thing, Carella decided it was worth trying to frighten her a hell of a lot more.

He slammed the door of his car, stuck the key into the ignition switch, and started the engine.

Carella had been searching for Mary Margaret Ryan without success since Saturday afternoon. He had tried the apartment on Porter Street, where she said she was living, but Henry and Bob told him she hadn't been around, and they had no idea where she was. He had then tried all the neighborhood places she might have frequented, and had even staked out

Elliot's shop, on the off-chance she might go there to see him, but she had not put in an appearance.

Now, at ten o'clock on Monday morning, April 26, Carella roamed Rutland Street looking for a silver motorcycle. During their brief conversation last Tuesday, Yank had told Carella that he'd blown in a few weeks back, and was living in an apartment on Rutland. He had not given the address, but Carella didn't think he'd have too much trouble finding the place—it is almost impossible to hide something as large as a motorcycle. He did not honestly expect Yank or his friends to know anything about the whereabouts of Mary Margaret Ryan; she hardly seemed like the kind of girl who'd run with a motorcycle gang. However, Yank and a bikie named Ox had been in Elliot's shop Saturday, and the argument Carella had witnessed through the plate-glass window seemed something more than casual. When you run out of places to look, you'll look anywhere. Mary Margaret Ryan had to be someplace; *everybody's* got to be someplace, man.

After fifteen minutes on the block, he located *three* bikes chained to the metal post of a banister in the downstairs hallway of 601 Rutland. He knocked on the door of the sole apartment on

the ground floor and asked the man who answered it where the bikies were living.

"You going to bust them?" the man asked.

"What apartment are they in?"

"Second floor front," the man said. "I wish you'd clean them out of here."

"Why?"

"Because they're no damn good," he said, and closed the door.

Carella went up to the second floor. Several brown bags of garbage were leaning against the hallway wall. He listened outside the door, heard voices inside, and knocked. A blond man, naked to the waist, opened the door. He was powerful and huge, with hard, tight muscles developed by years of weight lifting. Barefooted, with blue jeans stretched tight over bulging thighs, he looked out at Carella and said nothing.

"Police officer," Carella said. "I'm looking for some people named Ox and Yank."

"Why?" the blond said.

"Couple of questions I want to ask them."

The blond studied him, shrugged, said, "Okay," and led him into the apartment. Ox and Yank were sitting at a table in the kitchen drinking beer.

"Well, well," Yank said.

"Who's this guy?" Ox asked.

"A gentleman from the police," Yank said, and added with mock formality, "I fear I've forgotten your name, Officer."

"Detective Carella."

"Carella, Carella, right. What can we do for you, Detective Carella?"

"Have you seen Mary Margaret around?" Carella asked.

"Who?"

"Mary Margaret Ryan."

"Don't know her," Yank said.

"How about you?" Carella said.

"Nope," Ox answered.

"Me neither," the blond said.

"Girl about this high," Carella said, "long brown hair, brown eyes."

"Nope," Yank said.

"Reason I ask—"

"We don't know her," Yank said.

"Reason I ask," Carella repeated, "is that she poses for Sanford Elliot, and—"

"Don't know him, either," Yank said.

"You don't, huh?"

"Nope."

"None of you know him, huh?"

"None of us," Yank said.

"Have you had any second thoughts about that picture I showed you?"

"Nope, no second thoughts," Yank said. "Sorry."

"You want to take a look at this picture, Ox?"

"What picture?" Ox asked.

"This one," Carella said, and took the photograph from his notebook.

He handed it to Ox, looking into his face, looking into his eyes, and becoming suddenly unsettled by what he saw there. Through the plate-glass window of Elliot's shop, Ox had somehow appeared both intelligent and articulate, perhaps because he had been delivering a finger-waving harangue. Now, after having heard his voice, after having seen his eyes, Carella knew at once that he was dealing with someone only slightly more alert than a beast of the field. The discovery was frightening. *Give me the smart ones any time, Carella thought. I'll take a thousand super-criminals if you'll only keep the stupid ones away from me.*

"Recognize him?" he asked.

"No," Ox said, and tossed the photograph onto the table.

"I was talking to Sanford Elliot Saturday," Carella said. "I thought *he* might be able to help me with this picture." He picked it up, put it back into his notebook and waited. Neither Ox nor Yank said a word. "You say you don't know him, huh?"

"What was the name?" Ox said.

"Sanford Elliot. His friends call

him Sandy. Does some sculpture."

"Never heard of him," Ox said.

"Uh-huh," Carella said. He looked around the room. "Nice place. Is it yours?" he asked the bare-chested, barefooted, blond man.

"Yeah."

"What's your name?"

"Who says I have to tell you?"

"That garbage stacked in the hallway is a violation," Carella said flatly. "You want me to get mean or you want to tell me your name?"

"Willie Harcourt."

"How long have you been living here, Willie?"

"About a year."

"When did your friends arrive?"

"I told you—" Yank started.

"I'm asking your pal. When did they get here, Willie?"

"Few weeks ago."

Carella turned to Ox and said, "What's your beef with Sandy Elliot?"

"What?" Ox said.

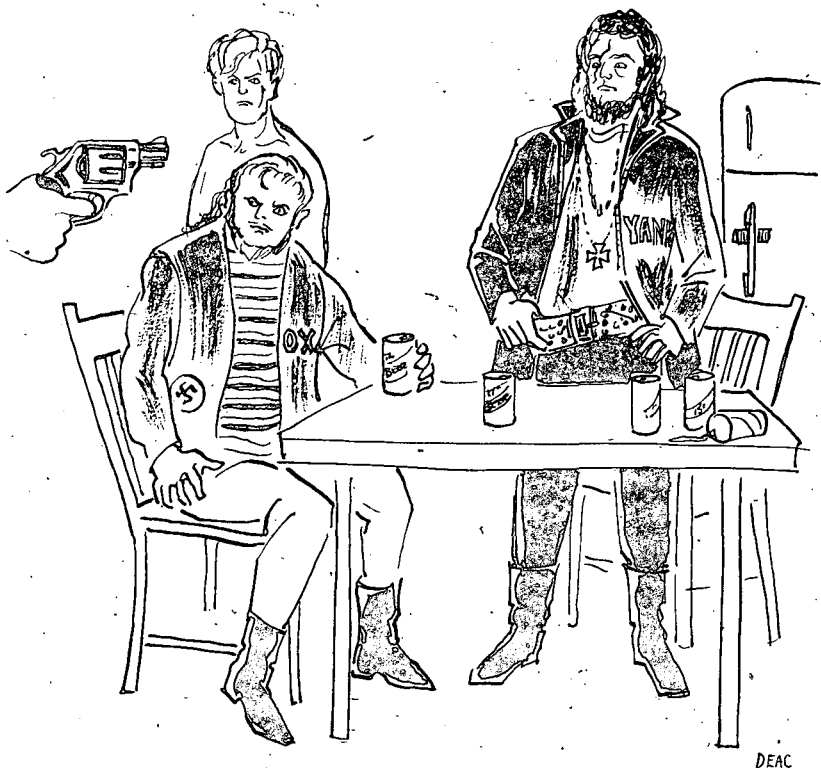
"Sandy Elliot."

"We told you we don't know him," Yank said.

"You've got a habit of answering questions nobody asked you," Carella said. "I'm talking to your friend here. What's the beef, Ox? You want to tell me?"

"No beef," Ox said.

"Then why were you yelling at



him like that, Ox?" Carella said.

"Me? You're crazy."

"You were in his shop Saturday, and you were yelling at him. Why?"

"You must have me mixed up with somebody else," Ox said, and lifted his beer bottle and drank.

"Who else lives in this apartment?" Carella asked.

"Just the three of us," Willie said.

"Those your bikes downstairs?"

"Yeah," Yank put in quickly.

"Pal," Carella said, "I'm going to tell you one last time—"

"Yeah, *what* are you going to tell me?" Yank asked, and rose from the table and put his hands on his hips.

"You're a big boy, I'm impressed," Carella said, and without another word, drew his gun. "This is a .38 Detective's Special," he said. "It carries six cartridges, and I'm a great shot. I don't intend



tangling with three gorillas. Sit down and be nice, or I'll shoot you in the foot and say you were attempting to assault a police officer."

Yank blinked.

"Hurry up," Carella said.

Yank hesitated only a moment longer, and then sat at the table again.

"Very nice," Carella said. He did not holster the pistol. He kept it in his hand, with his finger inside the trigger guard. "The silver bike is yours, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Which one is yours, Ox?"

"The black."

"How about you?" he said, turning to Willie.

"The red one."

"They all properly registered?"

"Come on," Yank said, "you're not going to hang any violation on us."

"Unless I decide to lean on you about the garbage outside."

"Why you doing this?" Ox asked suddenly.

"Doing what, Ox?"

"Hassling us this way? What the hell did we do?"

"You lied about being in Elliot's shop Saturday, that's what you did."

"Big deal. Okay, we were there. So what?"

"What were you arguing

about with Sanford Elliot, then?"

"The price of a statue," Ox said.

"It didn't look that way."

"That's all it was," Ox said.

"We were arguing about a price."

"What'd you decide?"

"Huh?"

"What price did you agree on?"

"We didn't."

"How well do you know Elliot?"

"Don't know him at all. We saw his stuff in the window, and we went in to ask about it."

"What about Mary Margaret Ryan?"

"Never heard of her."

"Okay." Carella went to the door, opened it, and said, "If you were planning to leave suddenly for the Coast, I'd advise against it. I'd also advise you to get that garbage out of the hallway." He opened the door, stepped outside, closed the door behind him, and went down the steps. He did not return the gun to its holster until he was on the ground floor again. He knocked on the door at the end of the hall there, and the same man answered it.

"Did you bust them?" the man asked.

"No. Mind if I come in a minute?"

"You should have busted them," the man said, but he stepped aside

and allowed Carella to enter the apartment. He was in his fifties, wearing dark trousers, house slippers, and an undershirt with shoulder straps. "I'm the superintendent here," he said.

"What's your name, sir?" Carella asked.

"Andrew Halloran," the super said. "And yours?"

"Detective Carella."

"Why didn't you bust them, Detective Carella? They give me a hell of a lot of trouble. I wish you would have busted them for something."

"Who's paying for the apartment, Mr. Halloran?"

"The one with all the muscles. His name's William Harcourt. They call him Willie. But he's never there alone. They come and go all the time. Sometimes a dozen of them are living in there at the same time, men and women, makes no difference. They get drunk, they take dope, they yell, they fight with each other and with anybody who tries to say a decent word to them. They're no damn good, is all."

"Would you know the full names of the other two?"

"Which two is that?" Halloran asked.

"Ox and Yank."

"I get mixed up," Halloran said. "Three of them came in from

California a few weeks back, and I sometimes have trouble telling them apart. I think the two up there with Willie—"

"Three of them, did you say?"

Carella asked, and suddenly remembered that Yank had given him this same information last Tuesday, when he'd been sitting outside the candy store with his chair tilted back against the brick wall. "*Three of us blew in from the Coast a few weeks back.*"

"Yeah, three of them, all right. Raising all kinds of hell, too."

"Can you describe them to me?"

"Sure. One of them's short and squat, built like an ape with the mind of one besides."

"That'd be Ox."

"Second one's got frizzy hair and a thick black beard, scar over his right eye."

"Yank. And the third one?"

"Tall fellow with dark hair and a handlebar moustache. Nicest of the lot, matter of fact. I haven't seen him around for a while. Not since last week sometime. I don't think he's left for good, though, because his bike's still here in the hall."

"Which bike?"

"The red one."

"I thought that belonged to Willie."

"Willie? Hell, he's lucky if he

can afford a pair of roller skates.”

Carella took the notebook from his jacket pocket, removed the photograph from it, and asked, “Is this the third bkie?”

“That’s Adam, all right,” Halloran said.

“Adam *what*?” Carella said.

“Adam Villers.”

He did not find Mary Margaret Ryan until close to midnight. It had begun drizzling lightly at 11:45 p.m., by which time he had tried the apartment on Porter again, as well as all the neighborhood hangouts, and was ready to give up and go home. He recognized her coming out of a doorway on Hager. She was wearing an Army poncho, World War II salvage stuff camouflaged for jungle warfare. She walked swiftly and purposefully, and he figured she was heading back for the apartment, not two blocks away. He caught up with her on the corner of Hager and McKay.

“Mary Margaret,” he said, and she turned abruptly, her eyes as wide and frightened as they had been that first day he’d talked to her.

“What do you want?”

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Home,” she said. “Excuse me, I . . .”

“Few things I’d like to ask you.”

“No,” she said, and began walking up McKay.

He caught her elbow, turned her to face him, and looked down into her eyes. “What are you afraid of, Mary Margaret?”

“Nothing, leave me alone. I have to get home.”

“Why?”

“Because . . . I’m packing. I’m getting out of here. Look,” she said, plaintively, “I finally got the money I need, and I’m splitting, so leave me alone, okay? Let me just get the hell out of here.”

“Why?”

“I’ve had it with this city.”

“Where are you going?”

“To Denver. I hear the scene’s good there. *Anything’s* better than here.”

“Who gave you the money?”

“A girlfriend. She’s a waitress at The Yellow Bagel. She makes good money. It’s only a loan, I’ll pay her back. Look, I got to catch a plane, okay? I got to go now. I don’t like it here. I don’t like anything *about* this city. I don’t like the look of it, I don’t like the people, I don’t like—”

“Where’ve you been hiding?”

“I *haven’t* been hiding. I was busy trying to raise some bread, that’s all. I had to talk to a lot of people.”

"You were *hiding*, Mary Margaret. Who from?"

"Nobody."

"Who the hell are you *running* from?"

"Nobody, nobody."

"What was Sandy doing in that abandoned building on the eighteenth?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Were *you* there, too?"

"No."

"Where were you?"

"I told you. In Boston. We were both in Boston."

"Where in Boston?"

"I don't know."

"How'd Sandy burn his foot?"

"Burn? It's not burned, it's—"

"It's *burned*. How'd it happen?"

"I don't know. Please, I have to—"

"Who killed Adam Villers?"

"Adam? How . . . how do you . . . ?"

"I know his name, and I know when he got here, and I know his friends have been to see Sandy. Now, how about it, Mary Margaret?"

"Please, please . . ."

"Are you going to tell me what happened, or—?"

"Oh my God, oh my God," she said, and suddenly covered her face with her hands and began sobbing.

They stood in the rain, Mary

Margaret weeping into her hands, Carella watching her for only a moment before he said, "You'd better come with me."

. . .

The three of them had arrived only a few days before, and still hadn't caught up with their friend, the blond one with the muscles, I don't know his name. So they were flopping in the building on Harrison when they first made contact with Sandy. It was Adam Villers who came into the shop. He was a decent person, Adam. There's nothing that says bikies can't be decent. He was honestly trying to set something up; and it cost him his life.

What he did was, he came into the shop to tell Sandy how much he liked his work. He's a good artist, you know, a really good one. Well, you saw his stuff, you know how good he is. But he just wasn't *selling* much, and it costs a lot to cast those things in bronze, and he was running low on bread, which is why Adam's idea sounded like such a good one. Adam said the guys he ran with could pack the stuff in their bike bags, and try to sell it, you know, like wherever they traveled. He said they couldn't pay what Sandy was asking in the shop, but they'd take a *lot* of it, you see, and he could make it up in volume. So

Sandy agreed to go up there—to where they were living on Harrison—and talk price with them, to see if it would be worth it to him. Adam really thought . . . I mean, Adam had no idea what the other two were after. You read a lot about bikies, and you get all these ideas about them, but Adam was okay. He really dug the work Sandy was doing, and figured we could all make a little money out of it. That's why he took us there that night.

They were living in two rooms on the fifth floor. One of the rooms had a mattress in it. In the other room, they had built a small fire in the center of the floor. The one called Yank was trying to fix something from his bike when we came in. I don't know what it was, something that had fallen off his bike. He was trying to hammer a dent out of it. Anyway, we all sat around the fire, and Sandy offered them some grass, and we smoked a little while Adam explained his idea about buying Sandy's work at discount and selling it on the road, which he figured would pay for all their traveling expenses. The one called Ox said that he had looked over the stuff in the shop window the other day and thought the girl was very sexy.

I think that was when I first be-

gan to get scared—really scared.

But . . . anyway, we . . . we went on talking about how much the sculpture was worth. Adam was still very excited about the whole thing, and trying to figure out how much Sandy should get for pieces that were this big or that big, you know, trying to work out a legitimate business deal. I mean, that's why we'd gone up there. Because it looked like a good way to make a little bread. So all of a sudden Ox said, How much do you want for the girl?

We were all, I guess, I mean, surprised, you know? Because it came out of the blue, like, when we were talking about Sandy's work and all, and we just sat there sort of stunned and Ox said, You hear me? How much you want for the girl?

What girl? Sandy said.

This one, Ox said, and reached over and . . . and poked his finger at my breast.

Hey, come on, Adam said, knock it off, Ox, we're here to talk about the guy's work, okay?

Ox said I'd rather talk about the guy's girl.

Sandy got up and said, Come on, Mary Margaret, let's get out of here; and that was when Ox hit him and it all started. I screamed, I guess, and Ox hit me too, hard.

He punched me in the ribs, it still hurts where he hit me. Adam started to yell at them, and Yank grabbed him from behind and held his arms while Ox . . . Ox dragged Sandy over to the fire and pulled off his sneaker and stuck his foot in the flames, and told him next time they asked a question about the price of something, he should answer nice instead of being such a wise guy. Sandy passed out, and I began screaming again because . . . Sandy was . . . his foot was all black and . . . and Ox hit me again and threw me on the floor and that was when Adam broke away from Yank, to try to help me. They both turned on him. Like animals. Like sharks. Like attacking their own, do you know? In frenzy, do you know? They went after him, they chased him down the hallway, they . . . I heard sounds like . . . hammering, I knew later it was hammering, and I heard Adam screaming, and I ran down the hall and saw what they had done and fainted. I don't know what they did to me while I was unconscious. I was . . . I was bleeding bad when I woke up . . . but they were gone, thank God, they were gone at last.

I didn't know what to do. Sandy could hardly walk and there . . . there was a dead man

down the hall, Adam was dead down the hall. I . . . put Sandy's arm over my shoulder, and we started down the steps. All I could think of was getting away from there. Have you seen that place? The steps are covered with all kinds of junk, it's like walking through a junk yard. But I got him down to the street, he was in such pain, he kept moaning, and we couldn't find a taxi, there are never any taxis in this neighborhood. But finally we got one, and I took him over to the clinic at Buenavista Hospital, and they treated his foot, and we hoped it was all over, we hoped we'd seen the last of them.

They came back to the shop the next day. They said we'd better keep our mouths shut about what happened or the same thing would happen to us. We made up the story about Boston, we knew the police might get to us, we figured we needed an alibi. And . . . we've been waiting for them to leave, praying they'd go back to California, leave us alone, get out of our lives.

Now they'll kill us, won't they?

\* \* \*

Carella was not foolish enough to go after them alone.

The three bikes were still chained to the metal hall banister, silver, red, and black. He and Mey-

er went past them swiftly and silently, guns drawn, and climbed to the second floor. They fanned out on both sides of the door to Apartment 2A and then, facing each other, put their ears to the door and listened.

"How many?" Carella whispered.

"I can make out at least four," Meyer whispered back.

"You ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

The worst part about kicking in a door was that you never knew what might be on the other side of it. You could listen for an hour, you could distinguish two different voices, or five, or eight, and then break in to find an army with sawed-off shotguns, determined to blow you down the stairs and out into the gutter. Meyer had heard four distinctly different voices, which was exactly what Carella thought he had heard. They were all men's voices, and he thought he recognized two of them as belonging to Ox and Yank. He did not think the bikies would be armed, but he had no way of knowing whether his supposition were true or not. There was nothing to do but go in after them.

Carella nodded at Meyer, and Meyer returned the nod.

Backing across the hall, gun

clutched in his right hand, Carella braced himself against the opposite wall, and then shoved himself off it, right knee coming up, and hit the door with a hard flat-footed kick just below the lock. The door sprang inward, followed by Carella at a run, Meyer behind him and to the left. Ox and Willie were sitting at the kitchen table, drinking wine. Yank was standing near the refrigerator, talking to a muscular black man.

Ox threw back his chair, and a switchblade knife snapped open in his hand. He was coming at Carella with the knife clutched tight in his fist when Carella fired. The first slug had no effect on him. Like a rampaging elephant, he continued his charge, and Carella fired again, and then once more, and still Ox came, finally hurling himself onto Carella, the knife blade grazing his face and neck as he pulled off another shot, the muzzle of the gun pushed hard into Ox's belly. There was a muffled explosion. The slug knocked Ox backward onto the kitchen table. He twisted over onto his side, bubbling blood, and then rolled to the floor.

Nobody was moving.

Yank, at the refrigerator with the muscular black man, seemed ready to make a break. The look was in his eyes, the trapped look

of a man who knows it's all over, there's nothing to lose; stay or run, there's nothing to lose. Meyer recognized the look because he had seen it a hundred times before. He did not know who any of these men were, but he knew that Yank was the one about to break, and was therefore extremely dangerous.

He swung the gun on him.

"Don't," Yank said.

The gun was steady in Meyer's hand, leveled at Yank's heart. A new look came into Yank's eyes, replacing the trapped and desperate glitter that had been in them not a moment before. Meyer had seen this look, too—there was nothing new under the sun. It was a look composed of guilt, surrender, and relief. He knew now that Yank would stay right where he

was until the cuffs were closed on his wrists. There would be no further trouble.

Willie Harcourt sat at the kitchen table with his eyes wide in terror. Ox was at his feet, dead and bleeding. Willie was afraid to move because he thought they might shoot him, too.

"Is there a phone in here?" Carella asked.

"N-n-no," Willie stammered.

"What's *your* name, mister?" Carella asked the black man.

"Frankie Childs. I don't know these guys from a hole in the wall. I came up for a little wine, that's all."

"You're bleeding, Steve," Meyer said.

Carella touched his handkerchief to his face. "Yeah," he said, and tried to catch his breath.



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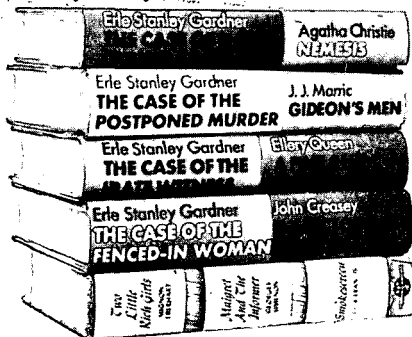
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